

Dear Future You

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/56847199) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/56847199>.

Rating:

[Explicit](#)

Archive Warning:

[Graphic Depictions Of Violence](#)

Category:

[F/M](#)

Fandom:

[Naruto \(Anime & Manga\)](#)

Relationships:

[Haruno Sakura/Hatake Kakashi](#), [Haruno Sakura & Hatake Kakashi](#)

Characters:

[Haruno Sakura](#), [Hatake Kakashi](#), [Pakkun \(Naruto\)](#)

Additional Tags:

[BAMF Haruno Sakura](#), [BAMF Hatake Kakashi](#), [Anbu Haruno Sakura](#), [Anbu Hatake Kakashi](#), [Canon Related](#), [Romance](#), [Slow Burn](#), [Tooth-Rotting Fluff](#), [Pining Hatake Kakashi](#), [Hatake Kakashi is Bad at Feelings](#), [but that's okay](#), [Can I fit everything I love into one fic?](#), [i'm sure gonna try](#), [Time Travel](#), [Time Shenanigans](#), [Flashbacks](#), [Sakura kicks ass](#), [Kakashi cooks](#), [because I like food](#), [plus ninken that act suspiciously like yakuza](#), [just trust me](#), [Community: kakasaku](#), [Not Beta Read](#)

Language:

[English](#)

Stats:

Published: 2024-06-23 Completed: 2024-08-24 Words: 80,003

Chapters: 10/10

Dear Future You

by [Scarecrows_to_CherryTrees](#)

Summary

Sakura is accidently sent 15 years back to when Team 7 is just starting out. She knows Kakashi, but Kakashi certainly doesn't know her. At least...not yet.

OR

What is it like meeting the love of your life, before they even know what you mean to them? Love is not always on equal footing, but it can grow to be.

Notes

This story is really just a really long, entirely self-indulgent, love-letter to my Husband.

We have an age-gape even larger than Sakura and Kakashi's, and I often wondered what it would have been like if we met at the same age. (The honest answer: probably terrible lol)

But! I came into this KakaSaku by accident--fell in love--and never wanted to leave. So, here we go!

Note: It doesn't always fit Canon, and it's not supposed to. If you think I sat here debating temporal validity, time-loops, cause/affect...you'd be terribly disappointed. Let's just go with the flow.

Please do NOT post my work anywhere else (i.e. wattpad). I do not give permission.

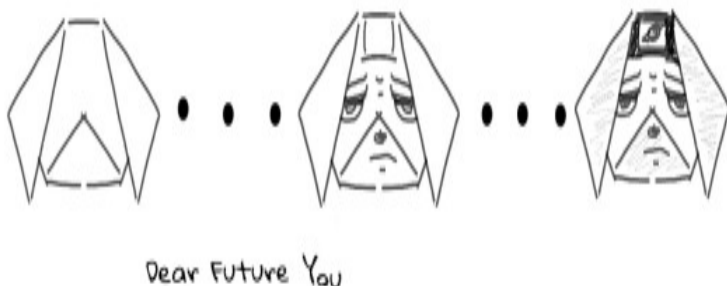
Disclaimer: I don't own Naruto, Naruto Shippuden, or Boruto. That's all Kishimoto.

Prologue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

[image]



[image] [image]

Chapter 1: Prologue

[image] [image] [image]

Sakura cringed as her fist made contact with the hard outer shell of the insect summon. It was *hard*. Harder than stone—it barely cracked under her fist.

“Ow.” She hissed to herself. “*Madara’s lumbar, sacrum, and coccyx*—that actually hurt.”

Why a centipede? she thought, completely disgusted.

She blew out a slow breath as she cradled her damaged fist. Sakura jumped back giving herself some space and gazed up.

The summon was huge—beyond what Sakura was expecting honestly. It was a small miracle that the enemy was located quickly. The bug was already close to the outer border of the village, and had broken through the tall protective walls that surrounded their territory.

The insect spotted her. Numerous legs slithered like waves as it pushed forward to charge at her again. She decided not to move

though—one of her teammates would take care of it.

The purple of the *Susanno* caught in the corner of her eye, as Sasuke rammed the beast off its course.

She grinned at the Uchiha, “See? Teamwork.”

He snorted at her taunt.

Naruto's kyuubi-enhanced chakra was beside her in moments, rearing a Rasengan into the hard outer shell on the top of the centipede's head. Only a small crack was seen despite the enormous impact, and the beast was momentarily stunned as its head was shoved into the crater below it.

Sakura paused. Taking note of the battle in front of her, she turned her head slowly behind her and locked eyes with her Hokage.

"Why am I here again?" she scoffed.

"Maa, Sakura it's a giant centipede," Kakashi said as if it were obvious. "Isn't it venomous? We figured you were the best one to handle it."

Several ANBU behind him shifted uncomfortably as the beast rose from the dust with an angry roar, and the battle began again. The cautious security detail circled around the Rokudaime although he seemed completely unfazed by the raging sounds of combat just a few feet away. She knew he probably wanted to join in on the fight, but would never be allowed to unless things looked dire.

She snorted softly in response. "I mean...people rarely *die* from centipede bites."

He blinked and stared back at with half-lidded eyes.

"Fine." She sighed, "A shinobi's summon *has* to be lethal. I told them not to get bitten and keep their distance, but I'll see if I can land the killing blow. Its venom shouldn't be too much trouble for me."

For once—even though the sun was hot and blaring above her and sweat was running down her back—she was glad to be in her ANBU training gear instead of her medic-approved outfit. Even if it was all black and covered almost every inch of her skin.

The sleeveless black shirt and tight black compression pants covered most of her body, while bandages covered her arms and leather gloves

covered her hands. It was all ideal to provide some much-needed protection from any wayward venomous wounds (at least she hoped it was).

She observed the centipede for a moment, and made the decision—this wouldn't need a hammer; it needed a scalpel.

Sakura reached behind and grabbed the tanto strapped to her back, and signaled to get Naruto's attention. She heard that this enemy was foreign Jonin. One that was a Fourth Shinobi War veteran that blamed the Hidden Leaf for the war.

Unfortunately, he wasn't alone.

Although the five Shinobi Villages have been at peace for the last eight years since the end of the war, many individuals felt that Konoha should have been held responsible for all the death and destruction the War caused. Some even went so far as to blame Kakashi personally for Obito's part.

This Jonin—like many others who had probably lost loved ones—went rouge to avenge them.

... A sentiment Sakura was tired of, frankly. Avenging was entirely overrated.

"I need you and Sasuke to attack that same point of the top of its head where you cracked the exoskeleton," she said, jumping to Naruto's side. "If you can crack it a little more, I'll be able to penetrate it. Think you can manage?"

He laughed loudly, a huge smile painted on his face framed by his whisker-like markings.

"Easy peasy, Sakura-chan!" he bellowed as blue eyes turned towards his teammate. "*Oi! Teme!* Pin him down for me!"

Sasuke wasted no time. A large arm of the Susanno swung its sword down mid body on the giant centipede as its other free hand grabbed the beast's front mandible, thus pinning it to the ground. It screeched and thrashed violently, however Sasuke was able to keep it mostly immobilized.

Sakura felt Naruto's warm chakra claw wrap around her waist, as he quickly jumped and propelled them upward. She could feel the rushing wind and familiar swirl of chakra, as he formed a Rasengan

behind them with the other claw. His grasp released her at the peak of the arched jump, as he descended down before her—Rasengan aimed at the small crack from earlier.

Sakura followed suit behind him—tanto grasped in both hands over her head, and chakra pouring into the tip.

She heard the impact of the Rasengan, and Naruto's war cry rang out around them. He quickly flipped backwards making room for her entry.

The medic-nin landed hard on the head of the beast, her legs spread on either side of the crack, and thrust her tanto down with both hands. Its tip connected through the hard outer shell of the exoskeleton, its chakra piercing down. Although the blade could only cut so deep, the pinpointed chakra beamed down through the monster with surgical precision.

She could feel the soft, scrambled tissue inside—her chakra shredded and tore its way through—as she hoped. Now if only it was able to pierce far enough into the brain. At least she hoped that's where the brain was—Sakura reminded herself later to brush up on arthropod anatomy.

...And then, (she would recall later) many things happened at once.

"*Sakura!* " She heard Naruto scream distantly. But it was not his scream that alerted her.

Instead, the Rokudaime's coarse howl of her name made her eyes look up.

While her focus was directed at the tanto pushing into the centipede's skull, the foreign nin appeared on the back of the beast charging towards her.

She only sensed the chakra when it was a few feet away and realized a kunai was aimed at her throat. His arm was extended towards her neck and on it, she barely noticed, were two small centipedes racing toward her as well.

He intended to pierce *and* poison her thoroughly.

And just for a millisecond, Sakura took note of her boys:

Naruto—reaching a chakra claw towards the enemy nin.

Kakashi—hand moving upwards in a one-handed ram sign to most likely shushin to her side.

Sasuke—looking down from above in his Susanno as his Sharingan spun hastily in a panic, and the Rinnegan glowing.

Time stopped and the kunai inched towards her bare neck slowly and lazily—as if mocking her.

And even though she willed her chakra and arms to pull the tanto out as quickly as possible it felt weighted and sluggish and—

so, so slow ...

And then she saw it all swirl.

The world shifted and twisted into a whirlpool of colors and sounds.

...And then it was all gone.

When she was able to reorientate herself somewhat, she noticed it was dark, and still, and quiet.

So very quiet.

It was like she was standing in a bright room, and someone had suddenly turned off all the lights. The sun was missing in the sky, and in its place was a pale moon. The warm air from before was now a cool night breeze. And the sounds of battle were now a quiet rustling of leaves in the wind.

Her mind was racing and jarring from the substantial contrasts.

But she remembered this feeling once before.

Her heart sped up in panic, and she knew: *it was the Kamui.*

Or at least, the Rinnegan's version of it.

She had been displaced in both time and space.

~~~~~ かかし ~~~~~

Kakashi had just left his team at the Sandaime's office and trusted that their leader would safely get them medically checked over. He was tired—both physically and mentally.

And fuck—

How a simple *C-Rank* escort mission to the Land of Waves became *that*—he wasn't entirely sure. But he knew he needed a break from all three genin for at least another day or so.

Despite the numerous near death experiences—and this mission being truly and wholly an absolute *shitshow*—he thought they did fairly well.

If anything: this trip confirmed Kakashi's prediction that Naruto and Sauske had the potential he thought they did. He will admit that he *may* have slightly underestimated the difficulty of keeping three genin (plus a civilian) all alive against two *S-Rank* shinobi.

And he is, enormously *thankful* for the boys' potential.

But the civilian girl, Sakura, was an entirely different problem.

On paper she was the highest ranking kunoichi. In reality, she knew nothing of this world.

He understood why the Sandaime placed her on the team, but he couldn't help but feel sorry for her. She was a place holder—a third wheel. And if he was being honest, maybe even a calculated casualty.

Kakashi didn't mind the girl herself. She was what he thought any normal eleven year old girl would be like. She liked pretty things. And had lived an easy, carefree life.

But she didn't belong in this world.

Shinobi are broken, cruel creatures that fight and claw their way to their survival. They devour the weak or they die.

How could a simple eleven year old girl ever understand that?

It was all a matter of perspective—and Sakura's was filtered and askew. Innocent.

Kakashi didn't want to watch her be dragged into the bog. If he was lucky, this would be a good wake-up call for the civilian girl and maybe—fuck, *please*—she would silently and gracefully return to



civilian life, and he could properly focus on the other two.

Kakashi greeted an empty apartment under his breath as he got home and changed from his standard jonin blue fatigues to his ANBU uniform.

The Hokage asked him to cover a short patrol shift tonight since they were short on personnel, and even though he was tired, Kakashi was never one to say no when given an order.

He was, after all, ever the loyal dog.

The Copy-nin sighed and sealed his porcelain mask in place with chakra. He felt a dull sting and a headache was quickly forming somewhere behind Obito's eye. But he would never complain.

Quietly, he made his way out of his apartment, down the stairs and into the dark street in front of his worn-down apartment building.

Eight dogs sat lined up in a straight line, awaiting orders. The small pug-of-a-leader stepped out of line, as he addressed the others.

"You all know the drill. Make a perimeter and keep an eye for other human patrollers. If anything is unusual, report back immediately," Pakkun ordered curtly as alpha of the pack.

A chorus of barks affirmed the command. Seven blurs dispersed among the village. The small pug turned and gazed at him as if sizing him up. They both began walking towards the edge of the village through an outer training ground to the village walls.

"Are you sure you're up for this, Boss?" Pakkun panted beside him.

Kakashi shrugged, "What's the worst that can happen?"

The pug gave him a pained look and frowned.

...And then they heard a loud *Boom!* followed by a cloud of smoke.

*Ah—Fuck .*

~~~~~ さくら ~~~~~

The second thing Sakura noticed after the realization of the Kamui was that she was *falling*.

Plummeting—head down straight towards the ground—would be a more accurate description.

She cursed Sasuke silently for his lack of control over her placement, and turned to flip her body upright. As she did, she made the quick decision to negate her fall by imposing an opposite force towards the ground.

Fist cocked back; she punched down just as she was about to impact the ground. She adjusted the chakra in her arm to meet a calculated brace for her fall.

Despite her going for ‘*subtle*’: a resounding blast still happened, as well as a small crater forming around her. Not her best work.

Whoops. Must have been higher than I thought.

She stayed in her kneeling position, one fist on the ground and one knee up, as the dust began to settle around her. She saw two centipedes on the floor next to her. Their bodies were twisted and mangled in a tortured posture that she could only assume was a result of the Kamui.

Next to them, was the tip of the kunai that was aiming towards her throat. It too was broken in half and brought along with her teleport. She nudged the centipedes with the tip of her tanto and confirmed they were dead, before sheathing it within her shoulder strap behind her back.

Sakura huffed out a sigh, content that the fight was over for now. She began to stand up, wanting to scan her surroundings and search for chakra signatures, but she quickly realized what a mistake that was.

As soon as she stood, the blood rushed to her head suddenly and her vision crossed. She felt her stomach flip as she tried to keep bile from rising in her throat.

The world tilted sideways, and she was falling towards the ground *again*.

She braced herself for the impact—

But a warm, large, fingerless-glove-covered hand had grabbed her

bicep and kept her from keeling over.

She smelled bitter green tea and the pages of old books—and something that reminded her of rainy days in a bookshop.

And although she didn't see him right away, Sakura knew the hand. This chakra. This smell. She knew it all.

She knew she was *safe*.

She relaxed immediately. Her eyes firmly shut to stop the disorientation she felt.

"I'm okay, Kakashi. Just give me a minute to settle," she said in a soft grumble.

His grip tightened, instead of relaxing. He said nothing. Something made her skin prickle. After a few deep breaths, her stomach settled as she slowly, cautiously pried open her eyes.

What she expected to see was *her* Hokage.

Black fatigues and green-grey vest with the red blazing words "ROKUDAIME" embroidered on the back. Messy silver hair that never seemed to obey. An ever present slouch and maybe his beloved porn in hand.

And those two charcoal grey eyes that were crinkled in a smile hiding beneath the mask. Diplomatic and well-behaved, when needed (well, sometimes).

That is *not* what she found.

Instead, Sakura was looking up at an imposing Hound mask that was attached to an ANBU armor clad body.

The slouch was alarmingly *gone*, instead he stood to his full height—practically towering over her with killing intent oozing into the air around them. If Sakura had enhanced her senses, she was certain the smell of blood would be lingering off him hidden underneath his natural scent. His hair was slightly longer and untamed even more so than usual, giving him a feral aura that reeked in a warning to stay away.

And although it was the same man she's always known, the warmth of his two charcoal eyes were missing.

Instead, beneath the holes of the Hound mask she found a pair of mismatched eyes: one void and empty, the color of a rumbling storm cloud, and the other a glowing swirl of red. The color of blood.

Sakura's stomach dropped.

It had been a long time since she'd seen *this* Hatake Kakashi.

This Kakashi was the true Copy-Nin. *Sharingan no Kakashi*. The "Friend-Killer" Kakashi.

He was cold and calculated. And *dangerous*.

She had forgotten how he used to be—or maybe the current Hokage did a better job at hiding it.

"*Who are you?*" He demanded sharply. His voice was deep and low as always but held an unfamiliar harshness to it.

She didn't know what to say. She was too stunned.

Silence to his inquiry seemed to be the wrong answer as it brought about his impatience. He shifted her to her feet, and brought the other hand—Sakura just realized—holding a kunai toward her heart. She then vaguely felt several other chakra signatures quickly approaching them. She could only assume ANBU.

She had to hurry.

"I'm Haruno Sakura," she breathed out. His grip tightened *hard* on her arm. Sakura winced as its sting. She fought the urge to rip his hand off of her.

"Haruno Sakura is an eleven year old girl. And a genin. You are neither of those." The tip of the kunai dug a little harder into her solar plexus. "Now, try again."

His killing intent was swirling and swallowing them whole. Sakura watched horrified as the tomoe of his Sharingan spun faster. The other chakra signatures were coming fast. Any moment they would be here.

"*I am* Haruno Sakura." She demanded, her hand coming up to grip his hand on her arm. "I am twenty-six years old. A shinobi of the Hidden Leaf: ID# 50262."

She pointed hastily up to her hitai-ate wrapped in her hair as if that was proof. Was she sweating? She may have been sweating.

"And you are Hatake Kakashi. My *Sensei*."

She swallowed dryly as the ANBU patrol were walking out into the clearing from trees around them. She had to convince him, or she would be taken to who knows where. Torture, interrogation—

Kakashi scoffed, obviously not believing her.

"Then..." He snarled in a mocking sarcasm. And spat out the last two words with aversion, "*Prove it.*"

He finally let go of her bicep, but kept the kunai aimed at her chest. Sakura moved squarely in front of him, as she looked up and tried to meet his eyes directly although he was looking out of the Hound mask and at least a foot taller than her.

She could do this. Eye contact—she needed his trust.

She tried to ignore the five other ANBU circling around them with all their weapons drawn and ready to strike. Prey. *She* was their prey.

"*Fine!* Okay, um—the first time we met, Naruto did that stupid prank with the eraser—to which you said your first impression of us was that you hated us!" She blurted out in a rush. "And when we did introductions, I prattled like an embarrassing eleven year old fangirl... Naruto went on about ramen and being Hokage like usual! Sasuke went full-on about revenge against his brother...And *you!* " she paused. Mind drawing a horrific blank, "You gave us no information about yourself whatsoever."

His kunai dug into her solar plexus even harder.

"Not good enough," Kakashi growled.

Shit, I'm going to die. Her mind blanked again.

There were so many moments she wanted to list off for him—but if she was only eleven here—then most of them haven't *happened* yet. Oh, gods. She might cry.

This Kakashi hasn't spent time with Sakura yet. What was she supposed to say ?

That he made her watch Sasuke die in a genjutsu during the bell test? She watched him poke Naruto in the ass just because he's a perverted jerk? She used to sit on his back when he did push-ups?

And then she remembered what was strapped to her back.

She reached up behind herself slowly, and made sure he was watching the movement. She unsheathed the tanto as deliberately as possible, its shrilling sound making the other ANBU around them tense, weapons at the ready.

When it was out all the way, she slowly presented it to the man in front of her.

"It's your Father's. One of the reasons for his nickname the '*White Fang*'—you know, besides the hair."

She tilted it back and forth so the moonlight would catch the engraving at the base of the blade. The Hatake name's kanji was engraved on a shining silver-white steel, on the hilt was the clan's diamond shaped kamon.

Sakura continued, "You gave it to me for my Jonin promotion. Said you would never use it again, and that it was just gathering dust. That you preferred someone would get use out of your Father's legacy."

His hand slowly reached for the blade. His finger grazing the engraving through his fingerless glove. She brought it down towards her face and forced him to look into her eyes.

She pleaded silently.

"You said that I'm eleven now? If I'm right—and this is fifteen years in the past—then you have the exact same blade stowed away somewhere now, " she swallowed nervously. "I'm not lying, Kakashi. I really am Haruno Sakura. And *you* were my genin Sensei."

-

Chapter End Notes

FUN FACT #1: When I first started writing, I set out to write this entire story with no uses of the f-word and no sexual scenes. This did not happen. Ha. Such high hopes.

FUN FACT#2: Centipede bites are venomous, but non-lethal. I just don't like Centipedes (I'm sorry.)

FUN FACT#3: I've never posted a story, and I bet you can tell.

(Sorry, again.)

PLEA #1: This story is completed. 75k+ words. 10 Chapter. 10 weeks (I'll update every Friday or Saturday). It takes a little setting up, but if you bear with me. Take my hand. Maybe even trust me--I think it's a lovely story, but then again, I'm biased. (Chapters 7-10 are my favorite; don't tell the other ones).

PLEA #2: This work is indulgent. I wrote it for me. But kudos/comments are welcome--literally, if 1 single person reads this story, I will be so impressed. Fanfiction is so cool.

I am your Student

Chapter Notes

Okay, Okay--

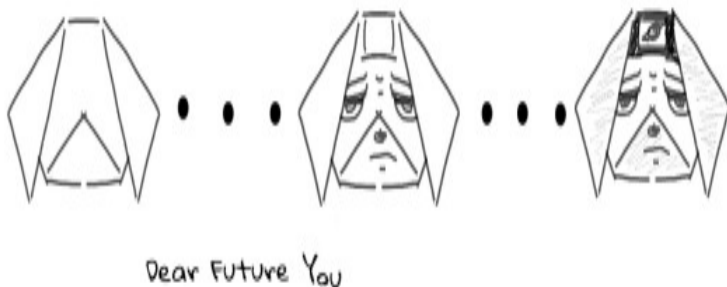
This chapter and kinda into the next--

I got to set some things up, create a foundation, and get a few things out of the way. Please bear with me.

Disclaimer: I do not own Naruto (or Naruto adjacent)

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

[image]



[image] [image]

Chapter 2: I am your student

Kakashi thought of himself as relatively smart. To say "*genius*" may be too flamboyant for his taste, but he knew he may be within the realm.

So, he drew conclusions. All reasonable. All logical. As a result, he knew the following things about the strange woman in front of him:

Her age certainly seemed right within the age Sakura would be fifteen years from now.

Her skill and chakra level suggested jonin, but her gear and attire led him to believe she was associated with ANBU.

He could confirm that she did indeed know Haruno Sakura's ID# (as Kakashi made a point to memorize all his students).

The purple diamond-shaped seal sitting proudly on her forehead most likely tied her to the famous Sannin, Tsunade-hime.

And *that* tanto—it was the only one he has ever seen made of the unique sliver-white steel that glowed when infused with chakra.

And of course, the *obvious*: she had the shocking bubblegum pink hair and bright green eyes.

Not to mention that even her scent—although slightly different—smelled intrinsically of Haruno Sakura. Something like sanitizer, tart strawberries, and jasmine.

Nothing she had said pointed to any lie *whatsoever*.

However—

There is no fucking way.

Kakashi was *severely* rejecting that this same woman could be the young genin he left hours ago. He could not fathom that that same girl could ever become someone like this.

So, his mind made the only logical conclusion (or delusional leap, depending on who you ask) to—

I'm a better teacher than I thought.

In fact, he must be some hell of a teacher for her to have succeeded to this level in life. And perhaps, he shouldn't underestimate his teaching abilities in the future.

Simple. Excellent. Good.

And then he sort of felt a jolt travel throughout his skin.

To some extent—*he must believe her then.*

(Which was just fucking insane.)

His first instinct was to laugh in disbelief—which quickly disappeared as then his gut wretched into a terrible sigh filled with exhausted

annoyances.

Because well—*fuck; why time travel? Why here? Now? Right when he was on duty?*—but he realized that he was stuck with the situation, and he would have to see it through (didn't that just sum up his life?).

He lifted his hand in defeat and signaled to the ANBU around him to hold their positions. They relaxed notably around them. The pink-haired shinobi released a small, tired but relieved sigh as she relaxed as well. He removed the threat of his kunai and pocketed it in its pouch.

"We will go to the Sandaime, and he can decide what to do with you. Don't run. Don't fight. Or I will quickly change my mind. *Agreed?*"

She rolled her eyes as if he was suggesting utter stupidity.

"Hai, taichou," she grumbled, but her lips tilted in a slight smile.

She quickly sheathed the tanto on her back, and without any guidance or hesitation, she started walking towards the direction of the Hokage's office. She obviously knew where she was going.

Kakashi followed behind listlessly, but with alert eyes.

He signaled to the Sparrow ANBU discretely to go on ahead and report to the Hokage before their arrival. The remaining ANBU flanked her, and he could feel their unease and buzz of frantic chakra.

They were on high alert. She made them nervous, and he agreed—they should be.

She walked confidently and swiftly in front him, and Kakashi could just *tell*.

The woman's hair was tied up in a long pink ponytail and twisted into a single thick braid that bounced side-to-side at her hips as she walked ahead. And while the hairstyle was new, she still had long bangs in the front and the Konoha hitai-ate secured in her hair that felt very reminiscent of *Haruno Sakura*.

Her body was trained and honed from years of experience and effort. She was small and lithe, but he could see well defined and sharp muscles of her arms and legs. The slimmest amount of midriff peeked through her outfit—boasting tight abs and core.

Her gear displayed ANBU-grade black pants and a black top made of durable compressed fabric. The sleeveless top boasted a high neckline but split into an inverted "V" below her ribs thus creating two twin tails of fabric that fell off her hips down to her mid-thigh.

It accentuated her figure beautifully—full hips and round thighs. *If* one was to notice such things.

Her gloves and arm guards covered almost to her elbow, and everything beyond that was covered in white bandages to mid bicep.

The only skin shown were her bare shoulders—one that sported a hidden ANBU tattoo just peeking out above the bandages—and that *tiny triangle of skin* of her midriff.

No, not a lot of skin. But somehow, it was undeniably...appealing. (Again, *if* you noticed.)

...And also, unmistakably *lethal*. Her body was a weapon—sheathed in black fabric, and ready to cut, just like that tanto on her back.

Despite the warnings she exuded, it seemed that the longer they walked, the calmer the ANBU around them became. Chakra was no longer spiking and rolling like it was in a panic. She didn't seem hostile, and maybe the other ANBU took comfort in this.

As they started to approach Headquarters, Kakashi sniffed quietly. He picked up a sweet alluring scent that he didn't notice before with her natural scent. It was subtle. Most likely her shampoo.

Finally, they arrived as Sparrow opened the door ahead of them and led them into the Hokage's office. It was empty with the Sandaime nowhere in sight, but in the middle of the room was a single chair waiting for their guest.

"*Hound-taichou*. Sandaime-sama went to personally retrieve Inoichi-sama from T&I department. He should return shortly. He asked for everyone to wait here," Sparrow said, standing at attention.

"Understood." Kakashi gestured to the chair. "Haruno, take a seat."

The other ANBU members filed in and spread out across the room to their posts—some visible, some in the rafters, hidden. Kakashi nonchalantly strolled next to the large desk of their Leader and faced the pink-haired woman. Her shampoo's scent felt a little stronger in the small room.

Kakashi watched her warily.

She sat herself in the chair—but it was *nothing* like how he knew the eleven year old Sakura would sit.

Young Sakura was prim and proper—always wanting to impress the outside world. She would have sat with her back straight as a rod, and knees firmly joined with an ankle tucked underneath. Lady-like and utterly polite.

Instead, this woman sat down as if it were her *personal throne*, and she was fucking holding court.

Her legs crossed lazily to the side as her body leaned towards the armrest. It stretched out the jut of her hip and the lithe curve of her waist in a *wondrously* lude display.

One hand rested on the curve of her hip—just near that little triangle of skin—as if she was tempted to feel the softness of it. The other rested its elbow on the arm rest, as she cocked her beautiful neck to the side and placed her cheek against the palm of her hand. With a coy pinky finger that stretched from her hand, as it was ghosting over parted lips.

And her eyes—

Those emerald eyes were half-lidded and staring down her prey.

She looked seductively fatal—like a black panther stretched deliciously under the sun, with piercing green eyes.



~A big thank you to: @juliemaksimuk

<https://www.tumblr.com/juliemaksimuk>

And he wondered vaguely, if she learned this from him: To look relaxed, but ready to kill when needed. And it immediately set him on edge.

He knew—*she certainly knew*—all eyes in the room were watching her. And that same sweet scent flooded the room again. It wrapped him around him like an embrace—both calming him and lulling him into plasticity. His eyes hooded of their own accord, and he felt his body relax obediently.

And when he finally took his eyes off hers, he noticed the other ANBU in the room. All were leaning as if intoxicated and were barely standing. All of them had hazy, glazed eyes that matched his incohesive thoughts.

...what?—wait—*Fuck*.

He realized then: something was very *very* wrong.

Kakashi cursed under his breath, and he felt his lips pulled back into a sneer beneath his mask. He pulled out a kunai and was ready to throw it at his target, when the door opened behind her.

Sarutobi Hiruzen walked in with Yamanaka Inoichi trailing behind. He quickly surveyed the room and walked around in front of the woman. His eyes glanced over the purple rhombus on her forehead.

And then he laughed—hearty and full—like it was the first time he had seen an old friend in some time.

Kakashi immediately stopped.

"*Haruno Sakura*. Tsunade-hime must have trained you well if she taught you that trick!" The old man smiled while bringing his pipe up to his mouth.

"She said it was hard to do: stimulating the body to produce a hormonal response that is enough to affect the people around you...in short: to slowly leak pheromones to calm and intoxicate those around you. *Extraordinary!* I once saw her use it in a game of cards! She wiped them all clean and left with many endearing suitors that night! It was as if the entire room was merely drunk on her presence alone."

The pink-haired woman's eyes surveyed the Sandaime with an aloof expression. She smiled sheepishly, but it didn't reach her eyes, and pushed herself up to sit a little straighter in her chair.

"I apologize, Hokage-sama. I wanted them to relax a little around me, but I may have gone overboard," she stated with a kind, but dispassionate smile. "I apologize if it made anyone... *uncomfortable*."

Kakashi stared down the women. She was a threat. A real one.

The Monkey ANBU in the corner scoffed loudly and mumbled something about 'medic-nins'. The Copy-Nin agreed internally, and put away his kunai, disgruntled. She couldn't be trusted.

"No harm done I'm sure," the older man continued to puff his pipe, as he waved his hand in dismissal. "Now, I've heard from a little bird that you not only claim to be Haruno Sakura, but in fact the same girl fifteen years in the future. Is this correct?"

Haruno nodded. "That is correct."

"You are Hatake's student, and it seems Tsunade-hime's as well? You must have been quite busy."

She paused. Eyes shifted to the Hound standing beside the Sandaime.

"Well...he was my assigned genin instructor, yes. But Tsunade-shishou is my true teacher. Sakura of this time should become her apprentice soon within the year. To be honest, most of my skills are from her."

Ah, well. Maybe Kakashi wasn't a genius at teaching after all. Pity.

"*I see.*" Sarutobi blew a plume of white smoke. "And *how* did you arrive here 'in the past' as you claim?"

She looked down in thought as she chewed on her bottom lip.

"*Sasuke*," she explained. "We were in the middle of a battle, and I was careless. Uchiha Sasuke used his visual prowess with a technique similar to something called the "*Kamui*". It essentially teleports you anywhere in space and time. I believe he was trying to save me and opened the portal to get me to safety."

The Sandaime stared at her with straight eyes, but Kakashi could see the strain. He never did like the Uchiha clan. "Will you allow us to prove this using the Yamanaka's ability?"

"Of course. Please feel free to confirm my past up to this point in time, and the point of the Kamui," she shifted in her seat to angle herself toward Inoichi. The pink-haired woman pressed her knees together and bowed deeply at the waist.

"I know this is a lot to ask, but please don't look into any memories between this time and the time of my journey here. The future...i-it's

a lot to handle," she struggled. "But I don't want to change a thing. I think it would be wrong to arm you with too much foreknowledge."

"How wise." The Hokage agreed.

"How *convenient*, you mean." The Yamanaka chided.

"*Inoichi-san*—I realize you don't have to trust me, but you have always been kind to me growing up. Ino is my best friend. I would do anything for her, even now. And I swear to you, on your daughter's life: I won't hide anything if you truly ask to see it, but I beg you. I don't want to burden you with the future's weight." She spoke with her face down, still in a deep bow.

The Yamanaka and Sandaime shared a glance. After a long moment, Sandaime nodded in agreement.

"Lucky for you, this is not the first temporal episode in Konoha's history," the Hokage gruffed in wariness. "Several of the most gifted Fuuin masters have sometimes stumbled into the temporal boundaries, including the Nidaime-sama and perhaps even, Minato-kun. It is, however, the first to my knowledge of an Uchiha being the cause."

Sakura gargled a strangled cough. "Yes, well...Sasuke-kun's dojutsu is something in a league of his own."

Kakashi tilted his head at the statement but dismissed it. He watched as Inoichi stepped forward as Sakura rose to a seated position. He placed a finger on the side of her head and mumbled the beginning of his jutsu quietly. Both parties closed their eyes in concentration.

Moments later he looked back at the Hokage and nodded. The Hokage sighed tiredly, a finger stroking his pipe in thought.

"It's just as she says: she's Haruno Sakura. There are even memories of the few times I met her with Ino. It all seems true. Including how she arrived here." The older man frowned as he continued. "Speaking of: the Uchiha was only able to make the portal because of his—well—his unique eyes... And unless Hatake picked up a new skill, this means the portal was one-way. She's essentially stuck here—"

"They will come for me," Haruno interrupted. Kakashi watched the woman curiously. She sat up straight and looked at the two men in front of her. Her gaze was strong and sure. Vivid green eyes held absolute confidence in them. "I have no doubt that my team will come for me."

"Your team?" Sandaime asked.

"Uzumaki Naruto. Uchiha Sasuke," she paused and raised a small delicate index finger and pointed directly at him. "And *him*," her lips twitch as a small ghost of a smile tilted the corners of her mouth, "Hatake Kakashi."

Everyone in the room glanced at the Hound ANBU. He stiffened at her coy smile, but his eyes continued to hang half-massed as he stared back.

"You're sure? Wouldn't it be difficult to find you?" Inoichi asked.

"I'm positive; they will not stop until they find me. I am invaluable to Konoha. And to them," she shrugged. "And I've seen Sasuke trace someone through Kamui before, it may take a few days for him to recharge a bit after a battle, but they will come for me."

Kakashi stared at her in boredom and a little bit in disbelief. The two older men exchanged looks.

"It is settled then," the Hokage stated. "You will be allowed to stay in the village for the meantime. Although I trust that you are indeed Haruno-san, I think it would be best if ANBU stayed to monitor you. And since you have a history together: you will stay with Kakashi-kun for now."

Kakashi felt his headache flare behind Obito's eye again. The Monkey ANBU chuckled under his breath a few feet away.

"Will that be okay? I'm part of his future."

The Sandaime nodded. "The Yamanaka clan has a forbidden jutsu that was once used for deep subterfuge. It was deemed entirely too dangerous, but..."

He puffed away in thought, before continuing.

"If you allow us: a seal will be placed on you that will encase the memories of all those in contact with you since your arrival. Once activated, it will be like all our memories were placed in a box and locked away. Once you return safely to your time, it's up to you to unlock that box and restore the memories to those you engaged with."

"So, none of you will remember this? ...You trust me with that?" She looked at Inoichi.

"It's not ideal, but like you said: we don't want to alter things. If no direct action is taken to change the future, I think it will be fine. Just be careful not to give any information away that would drastically change our response going forward."

She nodded thoughtfully. "I agree then."

"Then let's go, Inoichi. You and I will retrieve the scroll in the storage room," the Hokage spoke with a low graveled sigh. "I had to seal it particularly tight after Naruto-kun stole that scroll, and it will take a moment to undo all the seals."

With a wave of his hand, both older gentlemen left the room. Several ANBU covertly followed them out. Only Kakashi, Monkey, and Sparrow remained.

He watched as the pink-haired woman seemed to relax a little more at their departure. She slumped in her chair gracelessly and crossed her legs as she stared straight ahead in thought. Silence filled the room. After a few moments, her emerald eyes shifted to him.

"I have answered all their questions. Now, I would like you to answer mine," She shifted forward slightly. "What was the last mission we completed together?"

The room stayed silent for a moment. She stared and stared and stared at him seemingly patient, but he saw a fist curl in frustration at her side. Kakashi considered ignoring her request completely, however Monkey coughed lightly, and the Copy-Nin knew it was a losing battle.

"Team Seven and I returned today from the Land of Waves."

She laughed dryly.

"*Oh gods*, that absolute disaster of a mission? No wonder you seem so tired and grumpy," she grumbled, but still amused. "Haku and Zabuza still visit me in my dreams sometimes. Even though I've faced far worse threats and much more dire situations, the first never seems to leave you alone."

Kakashi did not answer. While Monkey chuckled at her response, Sparrow seemed to have her interest sparked.

"Momochi *Zabuza*?! You faced *that* demon from the Mist with just a team of genin?" Sparrow asked in shock.

Sakura answered for him. "He did really well despite the circumstances. Kept all of us all alive and returned in one piece," she appeared to recall with traces of admiration. "That mission was the beginning of *everything* really. It's where my faith in our team really started."

"Speaking of, Pinkie—you really think your team will come for you? Going back in time is a big deal. And they have all of Time to sift through. It seems like one hell of a rescue mission to risk?" Monkey drawled.

Despite Monkey speaking, Sakura kept her clear green eyes on Kakashi.

"I'm sure," she said with a small smile. "They wouldn't leave me behind."

Kakashi's jaw tightened. Her little smile grated something within him. He let his shoulders drop and his hooded gaze bore into her.

He felt exhausted and aggravated, and bad habits from his youth were creeping up from somewhere dark and deep—he felt *venom* on his tongue in the form of words.

"You're just one kunoichi," Kakashi stated in false boredom and slightly in denial, "*Why risk it?* "

He regretted it as soon as the words came out of his mouth.

His response—as expected—she did not like it. A frown spread on her lips as her eyebrows knit together in irritation; she cocked her head to the side as if he just said something extremely ignorant.

"*Oh.*—*Ha.*" She let out a humorless laugh. "I had forgotten how much you dislike me right now."

"I—" the words faltered on his tongue.

"No, no. *No.* Let's get this out of the way, so that we can move on like *reasonable* adults—"

The kunoichi scoffed under her breath. Kakashi swallowed.

"Maybe '*dislike*' isn't the right word...? You *dismiss* me. I'm sure you think I'm weak—a useless civilian. You never said it, but I knew you thought I should resign as a shinobi. And you are right: right now,

eleven year old Sakura is 'weak'. In fact, I remember coming home from this mission and crying to my parents—they both held me and comforted me because they could. Because any parent would! But being naive and innocent doesn't mean I'm without value. Being 'weak' now, doesn't mean *I'm incapable of strength.*"

Her eyes narrowed on his, a small snarl on her lips.

"When Team 7 starts branching out on their own—I looked to you, and you dismissed me as if I was *nothing!* And I resented you for *years* for it...But thanks to that dismissal I was able to beg Tsunade-shishou to make me her apprentice. It's one reason why I trained so damn hard! I never said it to the older you because we moved past it—but since I have a chance now: *You are wrong.* I am worth it."

"I am the most powerful kunoichi in the village. A Neo-Sannin. A Slug-Princess. The best damn Medic alive, even surpassing Tsunade-shishou. And I'm the Director of the Hospital and all its clinics." She yanked down the bandages on her right shoulder. Below hid the full ANBU seal. "I'm an ANBU Captain, even those two—*Genma! Yugao!* "

Monkey and Sparrow straightened upright at their names.

"—have reported under me many times. I am the wife of one of the most powerful shinobi of all time, and the mother of his children...And *you!* Hatake Kakashi, should have seen more in me."

Kakashi grimaced at her rant as Obito's eye pulsed again in a dull pain.

Well—she was justified.

If this *really* was what Sakura would become—then, he *had* underestimated her.

She took a deep breath and exhaled. After a moment, she looked away from him, finally releasing Kakashi from her rage.

"Although you weren't much of a teacher, I did learn one thing from you, *Sen-sei.*" She said his title with such spite it burned him. "*Those who break the rules are trash, but those who abandon their comrades are worse.* "

Her eyes lifted and searched for his own. "I *am* your student—and so are Naruto and Sasuke. They will come for me—even if I am '*just one kunoichi.*'"

Kakashi closed his eyes. Grateful for once that he had masks covering his face.

His emotions swirled in his chest painfully. A potent mixture of remorse, self-loathing, and above all, *pride*. That his and Obito's *Will of Fire* would be passed down.

It was shocking as much as it was inspiring.

Genma, however, just laughed. A loud, abrasive, and annoying gleeful laugh—at his expense.

"*Damn*, Pinkie! She certainly knows how to put you in your place, Hatake! It sounds like she had years of practice! Ha ha!" Genma keeled over, holding his stomach. "Wait, until I tell the other jonin! The '*Great Copy-Nin: Hatake Kakashi*' gets his ass handed to him by a short pink woman he just met—"

Yugao snickered quietly across the room from him and chimed in, "I'll be surprised if you last the week with her, Hatake-san."

Kakashi sighed as his hand raised to rub the back of his neck. Sakura just smiled sweetly and triumphantly in silence.

"Not going to say anything?" Her grin widened. "You know, Future-Kakashi always has this tired old man thing going when he's stressed out. Maybe this is where it all starts? He would have said, '*Maa, Sakura-chan. Didn't you use to have respect for your poor old Sensei?*' "

Genma laughed even harder, and Yugao tried to stifle her laugh behind a polite hand. Kakashi just stared ahead with dead eyes and felt like this entire week was aging him at thrice the pace.

Fuck, I'm tired.

But before he could reply, Yamanaka and the Sandaime returned to the room carrying a large scroll.

"Looks like you all are all having fun in here," Yamanaka eyed the room. "Despite the humor, I think it's time we get this seal situated on Haruno-san."

He motioned for her to stand up as he opened the hefty purple scroll. After a series of hand-signs, the Yamanaka placed a palm on Sakura's center just above her navel. Chakra glowed in twisting symbols, as a circle with the Yamanaka crest in the center appeared on her skin.

Inoichi removed his hand and the chakra symbols turned into an inky black that marked her stomach as a complete seal. The slightest sight of it could be seen in the triangle of skin of her exposed midriff, the rest was hidden away underneath.

Sakura's finger traced it absentmindedly from the opening of her shirt. She looked up at Inoichi, "So right before I leave this time period, I just activate the seal with my chakra—and everyone just forgets me?"

"Correct. And you can unseal it again later if you choose. After that, the seal is complete and will disappear from your skin."

She nodded and turned towards Kakashi with a knowing, teasing grin. Kakashi froze the expression and blinked. "I look forward to having this discussion with you someday then, *Kakashi-sensei*~!"

Genma and Yugao snickered quietly.

The Sandaime puffed quietly on his pipe while observing the interaction, "Hound, please bring her home with you and keep an eye on her. In the meantime, I will keep my patrols on alert for your teammates."

Kakashi bowed and headed for the door. He watched as she bowed as well and expressed her thanks quietly to the two older men, and soon followed after him.

Sakura—he should get used to saying her name—walked next to him with an alleviated smile.

Kakashi did not share the sentiment.

~~~~~ さくら ~~~~~

They arrived at an older apartment building that somewhat looked familiar to Sakura.

As much as she tried to recognize the shops and buildings around her—it all felt translucent, like trying to remember a dream the next morning.

Most of this area was decimated in the Pein Attack, and what remnants that survived were covered and absorbed by new

construction around it. But as soon as they made their way up to his apartment, Sakura instantly recognized his home.

Everything in the apartment was inherently *him*; at least—what little that was in it. The tiny studio apartment was mostly impersonable and empty; but not soulless.

She noted many things that made her feel nostalgic—several bookshelves lined with every kind of literature, from historical jutsu texts to romantic dramas (including his beloved *Icha Icha*). An empty ceramic rice bowl with little blue dog paws on it drying on the rack near the sink in the tiny kitchen. A green shuriken-printed bedspread on the bed tucked in the corner of his room. Several dog bowls neatly lined up by size on the wall.

Sakura smiled softly as her eyes searched for his mismatched ones—an adjustment she wasn't quite used to yet. He was standing off to the side of the room, leaning against the wall with his arms crossed and watching her curiously.

"Have you been here before? I rarely bring people back here," he said while removing his porcelain mask, revealing his familiar masked face. His Sharingan swirled slowly as if observing her body language for the slightest movements.

He was leaner and more wiry than the Kakashi she knew, but despite the differences of his youth, Sakura felt the same comfort by his very presence.

"Once or twice," she lied. She gave a nonchalant shrug, and his eyes traced the movement.

Sakura watched as he tied his hitai-ate in place and covered the blood-red eye—another adjustment she had forgotten about, as she had gotten used to looking at both eyes now. She made sure to stay on his right side to keep eye contact.

"For what *possible* reason would I bring you here?" He turned to begin removing his armor and scoffed.

"I mean, I *am* your student...?" she snorted softly.

"So, you keep saying." Arm-guards unbuckled and fell to the ground.

"You still don't believe me?" her eyes narrowed again.

Two shin-guards slipped off and fell to the floor next to his armguards. He raised an eyebrow in rebuttal.

"Forgive me, if I'm still having trouble accepting that one of my cute little students popped out of thin air, and is now the same age as me," he drawled lazily, but it was bitter and full of sarcasm.

"Well, it's certainly improbable...Would you like some more proof that I am, in fact, your student?" she asked, thoroughly amused.

He shrugged, still removing his gear.

"Okay, then. Let's see..." She lifted her hand slowly and pointed, "The book: '*The Art of Fuuin Jutsu*' was a gift from Yondaime-sama. That rice bowl—a gift from Kushina-san to make sure you were eating properly. That ridiculous, but admittedly cute bedspread was a gift from Gai because of how 'colorless' your place was. And those dog bowls are from Yama—*Tenzou* as a thank you to your pack for rescuing him one time."

Kakashi's eyes darkened into a glare at each word.

His jaw visibly tightened, as he unbuckled the last strap holding his chest-plate up. It clashed to the floor abrasively with a loud *bang*.

Sakura didn't flinch. His half-hooded eye stared Sakura down—observing. Calculating.

"It must be pretty annoying to have your air of mystery just *whisked away*," she smirked knowingly. "For someone who sees themselves as detached and unreadable, you surround yourself with those you care about—just like everyone else."

The Copy-Nin scoffed and moved towards the kitchen. He searched the refrigerator with a glare still firmly set.

"Isn't that a little personal for a student to know?" He grabbed leftover ingredients and began preparing dinner.

Sakura wandered around the room leaving him to the cooking; her fingers tracing over whatever stroked her as interesting. She paused at the photo of Team Minato and frowned that there was not a Team 7 picture just yet.

"What can I say? You always did say I was your favorite student," she shrugged simply. His head turned at the statement, knife stopping mid



chop on a head of cabbage.

"Now, I'm *really* not sure if the Kakashi you know and I are the same person," he replied under a deep breath.

She let out an airy laugh and hopped on the counter next to him to sit. Her legs crossed as she leaned over to watch him cook. He was whisking a quick batter of flour in water, and she recognized the recipe as okonomiyaki. He mixed in all the ingredients and began to fry the savory pancake batter in a pan.

Watching him cook felt nostalgic, as it was something Sakura always loved watching him do since her kitchen skills were sorely lacking.

"I sort of forgot too—How different you are from before..." she smiled at him dimly. "You're not him yet. But you will be."

He didn't answer right away, but instead just watched her aloof as always. The sound of food was bubbling and frying aggressively in the pan next to him, but he kept his one charcoal eye locked on hers.

After a long moment, he replied.

"You admire him," he stated as he tore away from her gaze and finally shook the pan.

"I admire *you*. Yes." *Can't you tell?*

"I thought you resented me?" He flipped the batter, not meeting her eyes.

"I did. Believe me, I *did*." She chuckled breathily. "But a lot can happen in fifteen years...And you more than earned your forgiveness." she paused. "Although I'm not sure you ever truly forgive yourself for it... But you make it up to me, plenty of times over. And you will never abandon me again."

He hummed quietly an acknowledgement, but still refused to look at her. Sakura kept her green eyes pinned on him.

She realized *her* Kakashi—the Future-Kakashi—was going to remember this one day if she removed the seal.

"You're sort of my hero, Kakashi." She spoke as a whisper. His body stiffened into an unnatural stillness, as his eyes narrowed into a glare in automatic disagreement.

"*I'm no one's hero.*" He refuted in a low, deep voice with no room for argument.

Her eyes were clear and searching his expression, not intimidated in the least by his confrontation.

"Well, too bad. You're mine," she demanded. "...You've saved me more times than I think you really know."

"*Oh?* I was under the impression you didn't need much saving anymore."

She stubbornly lifted her chin, "Everyone needs saving sometimes."

"Your idea of a hero must be misplaced." His glare softened.

"Nope," she popped the "p" and smiled. "My dear *Sensei* deserves it."

He low dark laugh that rumbled with disbelief. She tried not to bask in the sound.

"And does your so-called 'impressive and powerful' husband know about all this admiration and hero-worship?" Kakashi asked jokingly.

Sakura felt her eyes widen.

She wasn't sure how to respond right away. Her hesitation made him pause and turn his full attention to her. Her knee brushed against his arm when he shifted to read her face. When had they gotten that close?

She stared at him, eyes locked with her own, and smiled.

She could feel her face flush, the burn of it across her cheeks, across to her nose, and then spread towards her ears. Her lips parted into a wide stretch. The corner of her eyes crinkled of their own accord, and she was sure they were shining bright.

She knew whatever was on her face was genuine and telling.

"*I think he already knows.*"

~~~~~ かかし ~~~~~

This day...more like this *week*... just kept wearing him down.

Kakashi asked about her husband to gain some much-needed information. He felt far too out of his depth; she was essentially—a stranger to him.

But she knew things he thought he would never be comfortable sharing. It was jarring and frustrating.

He meant it as a joke. Lighthearted banter, that could tell him more about the woman.

But then she *smiled*.

Why it was so effective, he did not know. But then verdant eyes met his and everything...

...everything went *still*.

A soft delicate flush spread across her face and disappeared into the pink of her bangs framing her face. Pink lashes turned upward in that same irritating all-knowing smile, like they knew a secret he did not. And full lips parted into a dazzling array.

Kakashi felt like he was staring at something that was oddly not meant for him; and it somehow made it all the more...

...salacious. Forbidden. And—addictive.

It was the first time, in a long time, that he thought of someone as truly beautiful. Not necessarily sexual, or attractive but...natural, pleasing, and authentic.

Something he hadn't even thought about since he last saw Kushina with Minato-sensei. She always looked beautiful around him.

He wished—later that night when he had time to think alone—that his Sharingan could have captured it so he could replay that smile over again.

It was a smile full of love, and happiness—and all the things Kakashi didn't understand. And some selfish part of him wanted to bottle it up and keep it for himself.

...But then he smelled the beginning of a burning dinner. He was abruptly cast away from his thoughts.

He flipped the completed okonomiyaki from the pan onto a large plate as Sakura hopped off the counter and walked to a small shelf that acted as a pantry. He watched as she grabbed the okonomiyaki glaze and dried ao-nori, and began topping the savory pancake like she had done this with him a million times before.

She even helped herself to his fridge—which was a bizarrely intimate feeling—and pulled out the mayonnaise. The pink-haired woman then proceeded to put it on only half of the okonomiyaki.

Kakashi observed silently, and wondered if she *knew* he didn't like mayonnaise on okonomiyaki or if it was just a coincidence.

She moved the plate to the small square table pushed against the wall and sat down waiting for him. When he finally did, they said their respective "*itadakimasu*" and silently ate dinner.

He noticed that she kept her eyes on anywhere, but on him, and realized it was a generous offer to allow him to eat without her seeing his face.

She was *accommodating* him.

Kakashi had never felt accommodated for, in his *entire* life.

It was an odd feeling—to see someone adjust to his preferences when most people didn't know him well enough to even *attempt* it.

He ate his half quickly and said his thanks for the meal when he finished. She was still working on her meal, when he decided to break the silence.

"So, the love-sick Haruno Sakura became a wife and mother." Surely, she married her childhood crush. Kakashi took a calculated risk, "How was rebuilding a clan, then?"

Sakura tilted her head as the chopsticks paused at her lips. "Honestly? It's hard work."

"How big is your family?" he asked genuinely curious.

"Ah, that's a difficult question to answer," she smiled softly and continued eating. "If you're talking kids and no pets—I have two right now—a daughter and a son. We were planning to try for baby number three soon too."

Kakashi hummed in acknowledgment and mused, "We're the same age now, and your life experience already exceeds my own. It seems like Sasuke didn't waste any time then."

Her eyes flickered to his and her jaw stopped mid bite. Her expression shifted to one of amusement, making Kakashi slightly confused.

"You could say that."

"Is it hard to balance a family with being a Hospital Director?" He pressed forward.

"Mmmm, it can be. But the hospital is in good hands when I'm not around. It's really the missions that make it the most difficult when the kids are young," she stated conversationally.

"Missions? You're still on active duty?" Kakashi eyed her shocked.

She pointed her chopsticks to her right shoulder. "I told you—I'm an ANBU Captain."

"I thought you were a *retired* Captain. You have a family...Most people leave when they have loved ones."

She snorted with a wrinkled nose and clapped her hands in completion of her meal. He got up to grab her plate, but she waved him off in an offer to clean.

"And I *told you*—I am indispensable to Konoha. I'm a combat medic; ANBU is where I belong. Life expectancy has tripled since I've been placed in ANBU. Just from my being there, we are more successful overall."

Kakashi watched her walk to the kitchen holding their plates. "And Sasuke is okay with that risk?"

The plates clattered aggressively as she set them in the sink.

Her face swiveled to meet his, and spoke with her jaw tight, "*He doesn't have a say*. Besides—my husband doesn't leave the village much these days, so someone is always with my children." She paused, "Regardless, ANBU needs me right now. And to some extent, I probably need it."

Kakashi didn't reply; instead, he quietly watched her back as she washed the dishes. Her face was blank, and her hands moved

mechanically—stiff and redundant.

No one liked to admit it, but all ANBU knew.

He wasn't sure if it was an addiction or a coping mechanism, but he also relied on the seedy black ops as a release. It was equal parts terrifying and exhilarating; and it made Kakashi downhearted that she would take after him in this vice.

She was still washing up, so Kakashi decided to take this opportunity to snoop. He discreetly checked the unassuming box that was tucked away on one of his shelves. He peeked inside, and—

Yup. There was his father's tanto.

Still in hiding, and apparently not the one she had placed near the genkan. Meaning there were now two.

Fucking hell.

She wiped her hands using the towel he kept by the sink and pointed a finger up at the clock above him on the wall.

"Isn't it time? Shouldn't you call them?" Sakura asked.

His eye raked over her discerningly. He stood and straightened to his full height and shoved his hands into his pockets. He could feel his irritation leaking again into his gaze, but instead chose to alter it to an eye-smile.

"I don't know what you mean."

She blinked at him and rolled her eyes.

"*Right...*" Sakura dismissed. "So, every night you *don't* send your dogs out to do a secret perimeter check around the village, because it's a nervous habit of yours—maybe, I *am* in an alternate dimension. Do you still read *Icha Icha*?"

His eye narrowed precariously at the pinkette. *Well, that's irritating.*

"Do I hide no secrets from you?" he questioned gruffly.

She grinned alarmingly wide at his frustration, "Maybe you're not as good at hiding them as you think?"

He scoffed in response and bit his thumb through his mask. The

quintessential *poof!* sounded in the small room, as eight canine figures popped into existence from the smoke.

It wasn't until the smoke cleared that all eight pups noticed the pink haired woman. An immediate resounding chorus of pants and barks echoed in excitement at the sight of an unknown guest.

Sakura was then surrounded by the gaggle of beasts as they eagerly sniffed and licked at her in delight. She laughed brightly and bent down to rub and kiss any part of a dog she encountered.

"Boss! Who is this lovely creature? She smells familiar..." Bisuke panted, tails wagging around them.

"*Smells so good!* I'd know that shampoo anywhere! She smells like that pup in the Boss's litter!" Drooled Bull.

Kakashi pinched the bridge of his nose. "You're right, Bull. This is the same girl, but it's a long story. Haruno is—" the said woman raised a brow at him with the use of her last name. "...Sakura, I meant. Sakura is staying with me for a little bit. That's...all you really need to know."

"How can she be the same girl? That girl is just a pup..." several dogs cocked their heads in confusion.

"Yes, but there is something else that is familiar..." Pakkun began. He nudged the other dogs aside and sniffed her thoroughly. The little pug's droopy eyes widened impossibly larger. "*Boss—!* Can you smell that?"

Before he could say anything, further Sakura grabbed the pug's little face and began to smush and pull his cheeks excessively.

"Now, now. *What a cute. little. doggy!* " She said with a blatantly fake smile. "I'm afraid whatever you smelled you need to keep to yourself for safety reasons~! Your Boss doesn't need to know that information just yet. I'll tell him when I'm ready, okay?"

She looked up at Kakashi with half-closed eyes and a frankly terrifying smile. Pakkun glared at him with pulled cheeks and attempted to plead for help.

Kakashi sighed.

"Is it somehow dangerous in nature?" he asked the leader of the pack.

Sakura released the small dog as he shook his body animatedly from head to tail to remove the feeling of her temporary abuse. He locked eyes with his Boss. "No, I suppose it's not."

Kakashi nodded, "Okay then. Keep it to yourself for now."

Sakura nodded gratefully to him in return. He snapped his fingers, and all eight dogs dropped their adoring nature and stepped in line alert and disciplined.

"Head out on patrol and report back for dinner. Dismissed."

Eight blurry shadows disappeared into the night, leaving the two shinobi behind.

~~~~~ ぱっくん ~~~~~

Eight canine fiends ran throughout the outer rim of the village, some hopping branch to branch above, while others scurried below on the forest floor.

"What'd ya smell, Pakkun?" Shiba asked with a pant.

"You always did have the best nose...what did we miss?" Urushi yipped.

Pakkun slid to a stop and looked at the group around him. "I smelled..." He paused. "I smelled all of *us*. And the Boss. And something that was a mix of the two. Her and him."

"So? Why is that important?" Akino growled.

Pakkun sat his hind legs down and his tail wagged unconsciously.

"I think she may be..." his tail wagged harder without his consent. "I think she's the Boss's *mate*. She's gonna be the *Boss-Lady*!"

Several ears raised and head cocked. Tails wagged excitedly in the revelation.

From far away in the darkness of the forest, all one could hear were howls and barks of excited laughter.



## Chapter End Notes

FUN FACT#1: Chapter titles are kind of inspired by the Naruto Shippuden Opening #2, Distance by Long Shot Party

FUN FACT#2: Genma worryingly sounds something like Matthew McConaughey in my head. My brain went, "Huh. I wonder what Kakashi's friend sounds like?" The answer: Definitely like a sexy cowboy.

FUN FACT#3: If you haven't had Okonomiyaki. Please, do. It's delicious. What I wrote is obviously a very condensed description of what it is, and it does NOT do it justice. It also is one distinct food I associate with my Husband (His close friend owns an Okonomiyaki shop in Kanagawa and it's SO GOOD.)

A/N: Ya'll. WHAT? 150+ kudos???? No, freaking way. I honestly thought like 5 people were going to read this story--and we were going to braid each other's hair, and make friendship bracelets, and be BFF's forever. And that was that.

Thank you--so much, I can't believe it--for reading.

All I can say is: Yoroshiku Onegaishimasu. (Please take care of me!)

# I am your Teammate-Part 1

## Chapter Notes

Still setting a foundation. (Please continue to bear with me.) This is the last thing to set up. Last of the tracks I need to lay...next week, the wheels start rolling.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

[image]

## Chapter 3: I am your Teammate-Part 1

Sakura slept well, which was a rare occurrence these days.

She usually slept on the hard forest floor on a mission, or more likely face down on her desk at work. And on the more rare lovely occurrences, in her own bed before the little pitter-patter of children and dogs woke her up.

But while the quality of sleep was good that night—

Sakura rose the next morning utterly in denial.

She kept her eyes shut stubbornly and thought if she willed it hard enough: she would wake up in her own bed, in her own home, and in her own *time*.

But even *she* couldn't manage that.

*Well, Madara's testes and scrotum—*

She groaned to herself.

Sakura stretched in the spare futon that Kakashi had taken out for her last night. It was cozy enough, and he even offered her an old spare undershirt shirt that swallowed her entire body. She wasn't new to this arrangement and so she felt mostly comfortable.

Kakashi, however, did *not* look comfortable.

She heard him struggle to sleep last night as he constantly shifted in his bed on the far side of the room. Sakura could tell his breathing had never leveled out to a solid REM sleep all night...

...and she emphasized—*truly she did*—with what it must be like to have, what must feel like a *complete stranger*, move into your personal space.

How could anyone feel comfortable like that?

She sat up in her futon and rubbed her eyes.

Light was beginning to pour into the room from the window, but its pale blues and muted purples suggested it was still early morning. The sunrise was on the horizon, and the kunoichi knew Kakashi had already moved to the small bathroom to shower and dress for the day.

She yawned and looked around. On Kakashi's bed lay several curled up sleeping dogs while a few others were dispersed around the apartment—some at the foot of her futon, others on the small couch near her, and of course, Bull in his giant bed in the corner.

Guruko and Akino looked at her drowsily from the end of her futon and shifted to an empty dog bed across the room. She smiled as their soft snores began again, and decided to get up and start folding the futon to put it away.

As if on cue, Kakashi appeared from the bathroom door. His silver hair was damp and limp with the weight of water, as he attempted to dry it with the towel around his neck. He was wearing only his sleeveless masked undershirt and pair of standard pants.

Her eyes trailed his lean arms and ANBU seal; his current build still felt familiar-yet-unfamiliar.

She watched as the silver-haired nin began pulling on his standard blue jonin fatigues with a green flak vest that all seemed two sizes too big—a notion that Sakura wondered if he did on purpose to hide his true musculature.

It's been a while since she's seen this old uniform since they changed the design after the war. He tied his hitai-ate in place over his scarred eye—

Annnnd the transformation was complete.

He was suddenly the Kakashi of her childhood again.

What a sentimental sight.

"*Ohayo*," he announced in a low, soft voice.

"Good morning..." Sakura smiled drowsily as she rose to stand and she pointed to the bathroom, "Do you mind if I...?"

He nodded and stepped aside for her.

By the time Sakura finished changing, she entered the studio apartment to find Kakashi finishing his breakfast. All eight canines were notably missing from the small space already, meaning their master had already fed and dismissed them for now.

It suddenly felt smaller with just her and Kakashi in the room. Like the dogs took all the noise and distraction with them and just left...them. Him and Her.

She drifted toward the table and smelled the nostalgic scent of a traditional breakfast. Sakura knew he was a man of simple tastes, so breakfast was exactly what she knew it would be: steamed rice, miso soup, natto, and tamagoyaki with shaved daikon. A salad or pickles.

She smiled to herself. It pleased her immensely to know that some things never change.

"This looks delicious! Thank you for cooking again."

All she got was a grunt and terse nod.

Not that she expected more—he was obviously worn out. The poor man had such an obvious dark circle under his single eye that she could only pity him.

Kakashi wandered off to the couch as he pulled out a familiar orange covered book and sprawled himself out to read.

After she was done, she too roamed to his collection of books and found one to hold her interest and read. (*Aihara Takashi: Secrets of Photography*? Sure, why not.)

The morning then passed lazily and quietly, as the starting sun bloomed into its more vibrant and energetic counterpart of oranges and yellows.

An hour passed....and then another....and Sakura started growing stir-crazy by the second.

*Quiet mornings are for quiet thoughts, Sakura.* Her Mother used to always say.

She repeated in her head like a mantra. She thought she had mastered this.

Back when she didn't know how to curb her overactive mind and worries. Back when she used to wake at ungodly hours fretting about her appearance, or Ino's inane thoughts on her dress. And her Mother would set a hot cup of tea in front of her and tell her politely to *calm the hell down*.

She shifted while sitting. She tried laying down. She sat up again. She tapped her fingers. She bounced her knee. She did *anything* and *everything* to keep focused on her book.

Until finally, Sakura firmly closed the cover of her book with a determined smack and tossed it aside.

She stood from where she sat on the floor and walked over behind the couch. With a defiant hand on her hip, she stared down at him.

He was lounging on the couch in the *exact* same position from hours ago, never moving *once* in the span of time. She bitterly wondered how one could stay so focused.

He turned a page with a long, pale finger. Her green eyes traced the thick vein that ran from his elbow down to disappear behind his finger-less gloves. She shook her head to diffuse her muddled thoughts.

"I was wondering when you would crack."

"Not everything's a competition, you know." She snorted as she cocked her hip further. Another page turned. "I need to do something, Kakashi! I'm going *crazy*."

His gaze never left his book.

"We *are* doing something—we are reading; while we are waiting for your so-called '*rescue team*'."

His fingers begin to thumb another page.

"I know, I know... but I've got to do *something!*...I know I made it *sound* like they would be here at any moment, but you know Naruto and Sasuke! They could take *forever*." She's not proud of it, but she full-on pouted. Like the child she thought she outgrew. "Can't we just go out and about, just for a little bit?"

"So, you can somehow cause a temporal catastrophe? I'll take my chances here." Sakura's eyes narrowed as she watched him flip another stupid page.

"Am I a prisoner? Is there anything physically keeping me here?"

"Not that I know of." He shrugged as he continued reading.

"*Good*. Then, let's *do* something!"

Then she did the unthinkable—

The sin of all sins—

She plucked the book from his hands, clapped it shut, and tossed it next to hers on the ground by the couch.

She knew it was rude—but desperate times and all that.

As expected, Kakashi's eye widened and immediately turned to hers in a heated glare. He sat up and faced her audacity with a stern, silent reluctance—and a healthy dose of irritation.

She ignored it.

"I think we should have a little bell test of our own. *In fact*, let's make it a wager! If I win, you have to do whatever I say within reason. And if you win, I'll...I'll..." Come on, Sakura. Buy dinner? No, no she didn't have the money. "Cook your favorite dinner?"

His eyes narrowed at the suggestion. "Let me guess—you know my favorite dinner too?"

She smiled knowingly and bent down to where her elbow rested on the back of the couch so that her face was level with his.

She leaned in closer to him and spoke quietly like she was telling the most scandalous of secrets, "*Of course I do*, you silly man—rice, miso soup, grilled eggplant...and glazed fish!"

He raised an eyebrow, but his bored stare never waivered, "Has

anyone ever told you that you're a little creepy?"

She swatted his shoulder, but the grin on her face was unoffended. "Oh, who cares...I know everything about my teammates. You're my boys!"

He froze.

"I'm sorry." He paused in disbelief. "Did you just call us '*your boys*'?"

Sakura's smile turned predatory. Oh, she loved this. "The *entire* village calls you all that."

"..."

"Don't worry. You'll learn to love it—it's practically a badge of honor." She felt her eyes sparkle with glee.

The Copy-Nin groaned and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Has Future-Me ever told you how much I hate it?"

"Repeatedly. However—it's irrelevant. We are stuck together. Team 7 are teammates for life."

"Teammates, Hmm?"

Sakura realized it's been a long time since he truly considered anyone his *true* teammates.

"Of course! You'll see. I realize we three must be still pretty new to you, but one day we'll be as irreplaceable as Team Minato to you." She moved around the couch to sit next to him. "You were our teacher, but somewhere along the way that changed and we became equals. Not going to lie—it's *going to be one hell of a ride*," she said with a grin.

He watched her expressionless. "Equals, you say?"

Her smile grew.

"Let me prove it at the training grounds. Maybe I exaggerated a bit. I may have even *surpassed* you..."

Kakashi scoffed. Sakura beamed.

She grabbed the sleeve of his shirt with just the tip of her fingers grasping the fabric, and gave it a light tug to pull him up to stand. She shushinned them away leaving a swirl of leaves behind in their place.

She watched as he noted with an unsurprised glance, that pink sakura blossoms fluttered among the leaves.

~~~~~ かかし ~~~~~

Kakashi recognized training ground eleven as soon as they landed from the shushin.

...She didn't even give him time to grab his book. (*Damn, her.*)

The pink-haired woman beside him was still holding the fabric of his shirt where he rolled it up to his elbow as she looked around with wide green eyes that seemed to be reminiscing excitedly.

He pocketed his hands, making sure that his arm shifted enough that the movement would jostle the hand attached to it. Her jade eyes trailed to their attached limbs as she blinked and released her grasp, and moved a few steps away.

He noticed that she unconsciously sought out small casual touches.

Sometimes it was her latching on to some part of his uniform with those slim fingers; other times a playful swat of her hand or a comforting squeeze on his shoulder.

They weren't necessarily provocative touches in their nature, but it certainly indicated she was comfortable with him.

Body language rarely lies, after all.

Even last night she settled into his apartment and in his old clothes like it was the most natural thing in the world—which to Kakashi—was somewhat *alarming*.

Especially when she casually walked out from the bathroom last night, freshly showered and smelling overwhelming of her own dewy scent that was saturated and mingling with his own. The old shirt he gave her devoured her form, but left her long bare legs visible.

He didn't think it was such a big deal at first—that was until night came—and he found out she slept like a *maniac*.

As soon as her breathing leveled out, she was a mass of limbs—thrashing and kicking the covers off while shifting and turning restlessly. And that traitorous old shirt of his slowly slid up higher and higher up her pale thighs—to the point where she was about to unknowingly give him a full view.

Kakashi tried to be a decent person—strangers aren't generally comfortable with flashing their panties.

So, he threw the futon blanket back on her and before he could even make it to his bed, he heard her shift again. He risked a glance, and saw a future struggle of *Him vs. the Blanket*—a truly noble endeavor—but one Kakashi didn't ultimately want to be a part of.

So, he nimbly picked up two sleeping pups and silently crept over to her. After replacing the blanket on top of her, Kakashi delicately and strategically placed the dogs on her futon to pin the blanket in place.

He wished them luck, and retreated back to his bed. And turned to face the wall.

And tried not to think about legs, and thighs, and things he *definitely* didn't see...

...Heedless to say, it wasn't the most restful sleep of his life.

Kakashi glanced at the woman with drained eyes. She was stretching beside him with a small smile on her face, oblivious to his chivalry.

She raised her arms to stretch above her. But then folded one over her head, yanked her head to the side, and cracked her neck threateningly.

For fuck's sake.

Kakashi stared at the scene with a sigh. He was tired and frustrated on many different levels, but he knew it would be a mistake to underestimate Haruno Sakura again.

So, he lifted his hitai-ate and revealed his Sharingan.

This made her grin widen immediately, as she dropped into a low stance. He took the two silver bells out of his vest pocket and jingled them in front of her.

"Oooh? We mean business today. Not going to underestimate me?"

"I saw you fall from the sky and blow a crater into the ground." He deadpanned, but his eye creased into a fake smile. "I think we are well past that."

Her eyes gleamed. "Don't worry, Kakashi. I *promise* to fix everything I break."

Kakashi couldn't help laughing lightly at this very impressive (also, terrifying) woman in front of him. He mirrored her stance and readied himself.

"No restrictions?" He confirmed.

"Good," Her eyes positively sparkled. "Let's go—!"

And Sakura was off.

She was a blur of black and pink that collided into him at full strength.

He was glad that he wasn't stupid enough to not use his Sharingan; he definitely needed it.

He had to admire her; every step she took was confident and honed with no unwasted movement. But she fought with a tenacity like she had to prove the world they were wrong about her. She was fast—faster than he expected truthfully—but he was faster.

She also seemed to know this—so she adjusted her strategy: she became an *overwhelming force*.

She was a mass of barraging fists and harsh kicks that were unrelenting and unforgiving—like a wave continually crashing into stone, wearing her opponent down with each strike. She drove ahead with a dizzying frontal ambush that never let up or gave him a second to observe or plan ahead.

It felt like fighting Gai—a *taijutsu specialist*? That was unexpected.

And although he had the Sharingan, he felt like she was reading him just as well. He realized just how much of a disadvantage it was to have someone know your fighting style.

He would have to make the assumption that she knew all his skills and usual behavior.

Kakashi knew he needed to create distance between them.

He tried to jump away from her assault, hoping he was fast enough, but she followed him step by step without losing an ounce of distance.

Despite her small unassuming frame, Kakashi felt like he was going up against a wall. He knew one slip could lead to a direct hit, and if her strength was what he imagined it to be thanks to that crater—*it would definitely be lethal*.

Every impact—whether he dodged or blocked the assault—felt like it was wearing down on his body just from the insane amount of pressure she was exuding with each strike.

The Copy-Nin wondered if knowing him so well would also work as a deterrent. When she struck again using a small fist, Kakashi grabbed her wrist and pulled her in closer.

And just for a second—he activated his Chidori.

The overwhelming smell of burnt ozone and the shrill chirping of a thousand birds surrounded them.

He watched Sakura's green eyes widen in instant recognition as she immediately pulled off him to retreat away from his left hand. Kakashi made a show of trailing after her with his attack, just enough that it forced Sakura to jump back.

With enough space between them, Kakashi dispersed his Chidori and jumped back as his hands quickly arranged the hand signs for the Hidden Mist jutsu. A thick mist rolled in and covered the surrounding battle ground. He couldn't attack head on—so he chose underground.

He was just below her when she spoke.

"A trophy you took from Zabuza?" he heard her say with a muffled laugh. "Now, now Kakashi. It's amazing how surprisingly predictable you can be sometimes."

He heard a sickening crack that creaked and rumbled around him copiously. And then the earth broke around him into a million pieces and he felt almost flattened by the force. He managed to climb his way out and when the dust settled, he saw the extent of the damage around him.

The crater she created was *three times* the small one she produced upon her arrival. He realized she probably couldn't pinpoint his exact

location and just decided to break *everything*.

...He knew she was physically strong, but he didn't realize she was *monstrous*.

Okay, well fuck. Time for a new plan.

He removed himself from the debris as fast as possible, but she was already zeroing in on him. She rushed forward and threw senbon at him that he managed to dodge.

Or he thought he did—that was until he felt his right leg go numb. Kakashi cursed his short-sightedness; he should have known that as a combat medic she would be familiar with poisons.

He managed to somehow keep his distance with a barrage of flame jutsu that warned her off at first—but then a geyser of water was shooting towards him, and he knew it was going to be now or never.

He will admit he was surprised to see ninjutsu—considering young Sakura had zero affinity for it. She was much more well-rounded than he originally thought.

Taijutsu. Ninjustu. All that was left was Genjutsu.

Kakashi rushed forward as much as his hastily numbing leg would allow him. He met her, kunai against senbon, in a grueling clash of metal against metal. They were eye to eye now. And she was smart enough to know not to look directly at his face.

The Copy-nin took a gamble. She probably still had a temper, right?

"*Maa*, Sakura-chan. I thought you said we became '*equals*'?" he said, as lazy and condescending as possible.

She took the bait—guess not much has changed—and immediately looked up to glare into his eyes as if it was reflex.

Kakashi took advantage of this and cast his genjutsu with his Sharingan.

He tried to keep it simple: *a scenario played out that had her pushing him back in defeat and as he went underground again for cover, her monstrous punch to the ground caused him to be crushed by the debris*. All by accident, of course. It wasn't very original, but he imagined the left side of his body was crushed under a large rock—just as he saw

Obito's body before.

He did his best to relay details of that time to add texture to the illusion: the smell of dust in the air...the sound of crumbling rock in the far off distance...the sight of blood pooling around him.

It was an effective A-rank genjutsu that he had rarely ever seen broken before. All of it based on a true memory.

He felt her get caught in it. Her eyes glazed over and her body relaxed in its assault. He watched her hand limply drop the senbon to the ground and he was already reaching out to catch her body when she inevitably fell.

...But then of course, *life is full of surprises*.

He blinked as he saw her body straighten, instead of fall limp.

"*Did you just try to Obito yourself?!*" she shrieked venomously.

He felt killing intent being aimed at him, but by the time he looked up in shock—she had already yanked the bells from his vest with one hand and drew back the other in a fist.

And punched straight towards his chest.

Kakashi could only do one thing: he flooded his arms with chakra and hoped he could withstand the blow.

Now, Hatake Kakashi had never seen Tsunade-hime in action, but he had heard all the stories. He knew about her ridiculous strength that was said to be able to crush mountains and flatten cliffs.

...But he really didn't understand the extent of such an impact until now.

The Copy-nin was instinctively fighting the pink-haired woman like she was a heavy-hitter—like she was some kind of giant man using all muscles and strength.

So, when her punch came in contact with his arms—he leaned in with his full weight and braced himself.

(In hindsight, this may have made things worse.)

Her fist came in contact with his body and the punch itself—while much stronger than most human standards—was *not* what caused

earth to crumble.

She wasn't a muscle man; she was a *keg of gunpowder*.

She didn't bash; she *exploded*.

Her tiny fist thrust a wave of chakra that burst out—colliding and resonating out in a devastating explosion. At the time, Kakashi thought leaning into it would be smart. That was until he felt the resounding ripple of chakra move through his body as it shattered everything in its path. Including his defenses.

Everything connected in between the weighted vibration—skin to muscle; muscle to bone.

Oh, fu—

He could feel his forearm fracture at the pressure and his shoulder dislocate from its socket as the rest of the blow went straight to his ribs.

His entire body was propelled backwards without his control and it wasn't until he slammed into a tree, that the inertia was dissipated.

He must have blacked out for a few seconds, because when he came to, she was leaning over him worried green eyes and a small frown. Her glowing green hands were hovering over his body.

"Don't move for a second. *Damn*, I'm so sorry Kakashi...I went a little overboard again."

He tried to laugh, but his bruised ribs stifled the noise. "...Seems like a common occurrence with you."

She smiled wryly at him and forced her soothing green chakra into him. It didn't take long before his forearm and ribs were healed. Well, that's impressive.

"Okay! Almost done," she reached into her leg pouch to pull out a small purple pill and handed it to him.

"This is the antitoxin for your leg. I want you to put this in your mouth and on the count of three, bite down to crunch it, okay?" She looked away from him as he reached for his mask. "Ready? One...two...and *three!*"

He bit down hard as he heard the crunch of the pill in sync with a

sickening *pop!*.

He let out a painful hiss as he realized she popped his shoulder back in place. Kakashi couldn't help but glare at her.

Sakura smiled at him sheepishly. "*There!* You're all fixed up, Hatake. These are yours too." She chunked the silver bells towards him. "That's one favor owed, by the way."

The Copy-nin quickly caught the bells and stretched his arm while rotating it to test his shoulder out. When he deemed it acceptable, he hopped up and looked at the pink-haired nin.

She was accessing her own injuries—mostly bruising on her arms from blocking and a singed shoulder from a stray fire jutsu. She set to work on her self healing.

He should say something, right?

"Your medical jutsu is really impressive. Thank you for healing me," he said as he slipped his hitai-ate back in place to cover his eye.

"It's no problem. *Believe me*, I'm used to healing you." He watched her raw burn disappear under her glowing hand.

"I have no doubt..." he mumbled. "Just out of curiosity: who's better, current me or 'old man' me?"

Sakura rolled her jade eyes.

"Why is everything a competition with you—even *against yourself?*" she scoffed. "And you are not an '*old man*'. Can't we find a better name to differentiate?"

Kakashi shrugged. "I'm in my forties, right? I'm surprised I even made it that long. But if it bothers you, let's go with '*Future-Me*'.

She shook head at him, but smiled.

"Fine. Now, as for who's better..." She paused and chose her words carefully. "You're definitely faster right now. And your ninjutsu certainly packs a punch. But Future-You knows me better, so it's much more difficult of a fight for me. And Future-Kakashi...he has a lot of experience under his belt. It's truly a sight to watch him fight."

"Ah, experience versus youth." He pocketed his hands.

"Now, you sound like an old man," she laughed. "At the end of day: I could probably take you in a fight if I had an element of surprise. But probably not him."

Then—

She held out two fingers in a friendship-sign, awaiting him.

Kakashi stared at her hand in surprise, before slowly raising his own to grasp her fingers. When she let go, Kakashi debated if it would be weird or not, but decided to just go for it—

He raised a hand and placed it on top of her head, like he had done several times to younger Sakura, and ruffled her hair affectionately.

"Well done, Sakura. I'd be proud to have you as my teammate one day." Kakashi tried not to notice that his voice came out softer than he intended.

When he looked down at her, his hands stilled.

Her eyes had gone wide. She was flushing again; that same pretty blush from before spread across her face and neck, matching the color of her hair.

But her eyes were gleaming and wet as they stared at him, searching for something Kakashi couldn't understand.

Kakashi heard her take a deep shaky breath, as he moved to remove his hand from the top of her head. But before he could, she caught his wrist with her dainty fingers and held it in place.

He felt his heart rate speed up as he was unsure of what to do, and wondered if she could feel it racing under the soft fingers that were currently on the pulse point of his wrist.

They stayed like that for a moment—Sakura on the brink of tears; Kakashi in pure terror that he caused it somehow.

After what felt like forever, Kakashi watched her open her mouth as if to say something—but before she could speak, his attention shifted as his eye caught something behind her.

There, on the outskirts of her ridiculously huge crater, were three familiar chakra signatures walking out of the tree line.

Sakura must have noticed it too, as she immediately dropped his wrist

and placed her hands together in a henge.

Just as she poofed into a cloud of smoke, three familiar heads of yellow, black, and pink appeared.

~~~~~ さくら ~~~~~

Sakura praised her younger-self's timing.

She was momentarily reeling inside. A great, big, ball of emotion; and she was thankful for the distraction.

He had thrown her off guard with the head pat and the soft voice that sounded much more like *her* Kakashi. It was a simple, unassuming touch—but it shook her to the bone.

Kakashi rarely gave true praise to anyone.

It wasn't in his nature to just *tell* someone he appreciated or truly cared for them.

Every one of his loved ones *knew* he cared because of the small gestures he made, not because he told them with actual *verbal communication*.

...Like sneaking groceries into Naruto's fridge or always showing up with her favorite tea on late night shifts...

He was a man of action; not words—especially since half the time his words were absolute bullshit.

It was shocking to hear him say it when he barely knew her yet. She wasn't sure if she wanted to laugh or cry—but it made her so freaking proud, and a little wistful, too. She was yearning for *her* Kakashi.

But she felt the genin trio approach just in time before she embarrassingly gushed her emotional guts out in front of him.

Gods forbid, she cried on him. At least—not yet.

Sakura immediately flared her chakra to perform a henge. She went for minimal changes that were familiar and easy: purple eggplant-

colored hair replaced her pink, her skin darkened several shades, and amber eyes hid her green ones. She turned to face the three genin just in time, as they approached their teacher.

Thus, a tiny younger version of herself stood between a Mini-Sasuke and an adorable Chibi-Naruto.

"Man, Kakashi-sensei what happened here?! *Did a war break out?!?*" Chibi-Naruto practically yelled.

Sakura took a moment to look at their training ground with a wince: half of it was leveled into a giant crater where scorch marks and puddles sprinkled between stray senbon and kunai that littered around it.

She glanced at Kakashi. He was standing in his casual slouch with one hand in his pocket and the other rubbing the back of his neck unassumingly.

He gave an eye-crinkled smile. "Maa, we were just having a friendly spar. No need to worry, Naruto."

"All of this was just you two sparring?" Younger-Sakura asked with wide eyes as she surveyed their surroundings. Mini-Sasuke just stared at her with aloof boredom that he most definitely never outgrew.

"Were you the one that did all this damage?" the Mini-Uchiha asked after he finished sizing her up with a critical eye.

"*Whaaaat?! There's no way!*" Chibi-Naruto huffed. "Look how tiny this lady is? I'm like the same height as her. I bet you Kakashi-sensei beat her real quick!"

She shot Chibi-Naruto a glare and affectionately bonked him on the back of the head. "Don't underestimate people, you tiny idiot."

Mini-Sasuke turned to Kakashi. "Who is this?"

Kakashi cast her long glance. "She's my teammate....sort of."

"You can call me Chiharu if you want! I'm a friend of Kakashi's," She smiled politely. "I've heard about you three—you must be Naruto, Sasuke, and Sakura."

"Kakashi-sensei has *friends?!?*" Chibi-Naruto said in disbelief. Before she could reply, she heard a loud whack as Chibi-Naruto squatted

down holding the back of his head in pain.

"*Don't be rude, Naruto!*" her younger-self said while holding her fist threateningly.

Sakura tried not to laugh at herself, and cast side-glance at Kakashi who was observing her silently. His lone eye gleamed in amusement. When she turned back to the trio, she noticed Mini-Sasuke had seen the exchange.

"You're close friends?" Mini-Sasuke asked fishing for answers (and absolutely no manners).

Sakura raised an eyebrow. "That's...a little difficult to say. But sure, I know him pretty well."

Younger-Sakura's head swiveled to her in excitement—she grabbed the back of the two boy's necks and shoved them down close to her and motioned with her hand for Sakura to come closer. Sakura knelt down to crouch near the group.

"Chiharu-san, have...Have you seen it?" her younger-self whispered while looking at Kakashi. Sakura looked at her confused. "—ya know? His *FACE*."

Sakura tried really *really* hard not to laugh.

She had forgotten how obsessed they all were with Kakashi's mask. She had to bite her lip to keep a smile forming on her face and turned back to look at Kakashi over her shoulder. He stood there looking bored, but had an eyebrow raised at her silently questioning her too.

*Oh*. He was curious.

With her eyes kept on his, she smiled a large, sly grin.

"Pay attention, Hatake. You're going to remember this one day!" His face immediately flooded with confusion. She turned to the kids. "I *have* seen it."

The three genin exploded in excitement. Sasuke leaned in closer, Sakura threw a fist in the air, and Naruto bounced on his feet like an excited puppy.

"*No way!* You have to tell us!" Younger-Sakura shouted.

"Does he have huge teeth?" Mini-Sasuke asked in a rare instance of

eager curiosity.

"*Naaah*, it's gotta be fish-lips!" Chibi-Naruto said.

Sakura laughed full heartedly. "Definitely, none of that. He's just really...really...*REALLY*..." All three froze in place. "...handsome. Like stupidly, *handsome*."

The boys groaned in disappointment but Younger-Sakura kept her interest, so she went on.

"The kind of handsome that takes your breath away and makes your heart squeeze—It's actually quite dangerous, really. He should come with a warning sign."

"*Oh, come on!*" Chibi-Naruto griped with squinted eyes and a deep frown.

"I'm serious!" she looked back at Kakashi with a sweet smile. His eye was swimming with mirth. "He actually told me one time that he wears the mask so he won't have hoards of fan girls chasing him. It's seriously a distraction."

A total lie, but they'd never know.

"Tch, what a stupid reason." Mini-Sasuke commented.

She knew she was probably saying too much; but the feeling was bubbling up in her chest.

She made sure to catch Kakashi's lone eye with her own, despite her feeling that another telling smile was probably on her face. She decided to speak unabashedly and unashamed.

"It's true—" She paused with a way too big smile stretched across her face. "*—he's the most beautiful person I have ever seen.*"

The trio of kids seemed to take this at face value. But Kakashi, she noticed, shifted his eye to the sky and sported pink tinged ears.

-

## Chapter End Notes

FUN FACT: Sakura is believed to have both Water and Earth type chakra. This is the assumption I'm working with.

A/N: I spoke with some others in the comments, but to me-- Kakashi will always be like 75% a super cool, cold-hearted killer and 25% a silly dork of-a-man that's really just a marshmallow. That's why we love him. I hope that doesn't disappoint.

A/N#2: I'm SO sorry! I won't be able to update until this Sunday for Ch. 4. It's a serious whopper of a chapter, and needs the time to edit--and my brother decided to randomly get married this weekend. Therefore, I'll be a bit late. (\*Me\*: trying to explain to my brother that he can't get married on a Saturday because it messes up posting fanfiction. \*Him\*: looking at me like I'm an idiot.)

# I am your Teammate-Part 2

## Chapter Notes

Annnnd the wheels start rolling...

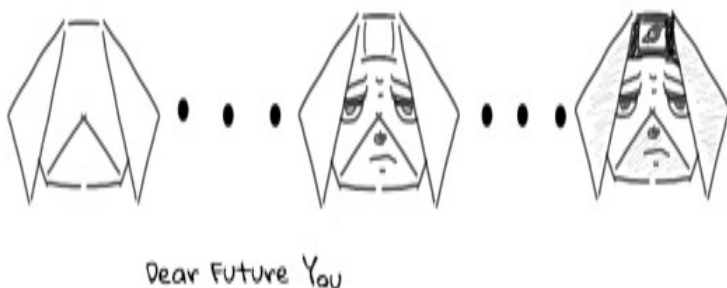
A/N: Warning!--This chapter contains gore. I am also not a medical professional.

A/N#2: This chapter is Long! (It's massive.) Apparently, my chapters run between 5k-10k. I hope that's alright as I did not want to break this up.

Disclaimer: I do not own Naruto, or any Naruto-related media

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

[image]



[image]

## Chapter 4: I am your Teammate-Part 2

They parted ways with the trio of genin after an early dinner of Naruto's favorite ramen. He did promise Naruto they would celebrate the completion of their first A-rank mission together, and it seemed like they wanted to know more about the mysterious woman with him.

By the time dinner was done, all *three* of them were smitten with Older-Sakura:

Younger-Sakura was star struck with wonder and admiration in her eyes towards 'Chiharu' for being such a formidable kunoichi.

Naruto was attempting (and failing) at hiding the bright red flush of his cheeks every time 'Chiharu' casually touched him—the poor boy was nursing a serious crush that was growing by the minute.

And Sasuke—well, Sasuke was mildly interested in her undeniable intelligence and strength—each of these traits he no doubt saw as an ideal for his future wife.

With great reluctance, the three genin said their goodbyes.

The sun was starting to set as Sakura smiled sweetly as she watched their backs disappear further down the road until her little wave slowed down and became still.

Her henge dropped with *pop!* and her smile slowly disappeared right along with it.

"Are you okay? It must have been odd for you..." Kakashi began awkwardly.

"Yeah, I'm fine. It's just..." her eyes continued searching for their backs. "We're so innocent."

She turned to look at him, brows knit together in concern.

"We are *so damn innocent*, it hurts. All of that is ripped away from us someday. And it never quite goes back to being the same."

Her mouth trembled, and Kakashi watched her gloved hand squeeze into fists. He didn't know what to say. So he just stood there, with his hands in his pockets and kept his eye on hers. He stayed silent and let her sort her feelings out.

"You know...I'll never forget: there was a moment on the bridge with Haku and Zabuza where you told us we weren't true shinobi yet, because we weren't ready to take a life in order protect the people we love...and you were right—those three aren't shinobi yet. They don't understand that choice." She wiped her eyes although there were no tears and steeled her resolve. "I don't regret what I am today. I would do it all over again if I had to. But....some part of me wishes I could protect my younger self from it too."

"It must sound weird, right?" She smiled sadly at him, but kept her eyes downcast, keeping the depth of her feelings hidden. Her voice was thick with emotion, and her smile waivered.

"...But I have a six year old daughter waiting for me at home, and she starts the Academy later this year. She's so excited to be a kunoichi, since her parents are two well-known shinobi—she feels like it's in her blood. And...every time she tells us how excited she is, my husband and I can't help but fear for her too. One day her innocence will be gone too, and I think it's going to kill me."

Kakashi swallowed thickly. He was in awe to see it—*the fear of a parent*. It wasn't something Kakashi really understood, since his parents weren't there to show it to him. Something foreign. Unknown.

But to see this powerful woman—a *mother*, he kept forgetting—so distraught and fearful gnawed at his core.

He wanted to protect her; and her daughter—he wanted to protect her whole family. And he silently hoped Future-Kakashi was doing just that.

Without anything right to say, Kakashi instead placed a hand on her shoulder. She turned her face away from him, but her hand quickly came up and lightly rested on top of his.

She didn't let go until the sun was fully set.

~~~~~ かかし ~~~~~

Kakashi woke in the middle of night to complete darkness and the sound of a trilling high-pitched ringing in his ears.

All normal—

Insomnia. Tinnitus. Sleep Apnea. Rinse. Repeat.

And nightmares—

All his old friends.

He has had many different types of nightmares in his life.

Mostly they revolved around blood—or more specifically, the placement of it—as he catches it in small images.

He seems to focus (maybe even obsess) about the places he's seen blood touch. Who the blood belongs to blurs in the dreams—maybe his mind does its best to block it out—but the blood that came from them in that moment stays stuck in his head playing over and over again.

Sometimes, it's a pool of it on a familiar tatami mat that he recognizes from his childhood home. Other times, it's slowly flowing out from under a boulder that crushes his teammate. But mostly, it's on his hands. And he's never able to get them clean again.

He wakes up from those nightmares tossing and turning, as he's panting and screaming—and immediately trying to clean what really isn't there anymore.

Today, however, he had a *different* type of nightmare. One he hasn't had in a long time.

It's not really a nightmare—

It's just a *dream*.

It's just him sitting around a table, but everyone he ever loved is there—laughing and chatting happily. His Father and Minato-sensei discuss something mundane like the weather together on one side of him as Obito, Rin, and Kushina argue about something pointless on the other side.

And just for a *single moment*—he can feel his mind give into the lie, and he believes it's true.

Just for a second, he thinks they are all alive and he is not alone.

...He is safe, and warm. And *happy*.

All is right in the world; all is perfect.

Maybe he's just hopeful by nature, but he curses that part of him. His mind is cruel, and Kakashi hates that it is trying to lie to him.

...So, he does what he does best.

The thing that they praise him for; the thing that they spite him for, too.

—He *snuffs* out the warm light until it smothers and dies. He chokes the sound of laughter and soft voices he can barely remember anymore with his bare hands. He ties a noose around his heart and lets it hang—

He *murders* the very thought of them.

...when he wakes from those nightmares he doesn't toss or scream.

All the air has left his lungs, and he's sure he stopped breathing in his sleep. He's suffocating, and stuck in the confines of his own body. Paralyzed, unable to breathe or blink. His lips lie open, and he's trying to push air in or out—it doesn't really matter—but he can't move. He can feel his eyes just staring at the ceiling above him and moisture wells up in the corner of his eyes until slow, betraying tears overflow.

And just when he thinks he'll be stuck there forever in that bed, and in this endless night—

Then, he heard her *snore*.

A loud, guttural, not-very-lady-like, and definitely-not-attractive *snort*, that sounds more like an old man than a tiny pink kunoichi.

His eyes shift from the spot on the ceiling to the lump on the floor where she lays, and he can see her shift sleepily as if the sound of her own snore woke her up. She sits up as she rubs one of her eyes sleepily just like a small child would, and luminescent green eyes flicker to him.

She yawns with a wide show of teeth and tongue, and grumbles incoherently before falling face first back into her pillow with an unattractive grunt.

And Kakashi breathes out a laugh at the ridiculous, childish, yet adorable kunoichi—

...and realizes he somehow started breathing again.

~~~~~ さくら ~~~~~

The next day passed in the same lazy fashion as the morning before. They ate breakfast and chatted casually, although their silences were

also comfortable.

Sakura tried to keep herself busy—she read until she grew bored. Then, she reorganized his entire bookshelf from top to bottom. She helped him wash the dogs and brush—every *single* one of them. She even dusted around the apartment like a frantic maniac and his lazy ass certainly wasn't going to tell her *not* to clean; so, she did.

She moved on to anything and everything, as she tried to wait patiently for any sign of her quote-unquote "rescue".

And sometime around late afternoon, an ANBU showed up at his door. The Tiger mask was not one she was familiar with, but he unceremoniously tossed a scroll to Kakashi and spoke in a low masculine voice.

"The Hokage has a mission for you."

Sakura sighed. "Does that mean you're going to be my new babysitter?"

"You're part of the mission too, apparently," the mysterious ANBU replied.

"*Oh, thank the gods*—Let's go, Kakashi! I can't wait to get out of here." She grabbed Kakashi's sleeve and immediately cast a shushin. He didn't fight it; but he was smart enough to make sure his beloved orange book came along for the ride this time.

They appeared in front of the Hokage's office door only a moment later. A Chunin dressed in a standard flak vest was seated at a small desk near the door. He jumped when he registered their arrival. With wide surprised eyes he stood and knocked on the door and pushed it open for them.

"Hatake Kakashi is here, Hokage-sama," the Chunin announced.

Sakura came in as Kakashi followed behind her sluggishly. They both gave a quick, but polite bow and mumbled a quiet 'Hokage-sama' as acknowledgement.

The Sandaime was seated at his desk, his crystal ball cushioned on a purple pillow nearby. His three-lined eyes widened at the sight of them, and his pipe puffed questioningly at the two.

"My, what a rare occurrence to have you show up on time, Kakashi-

kun." His gravelly voice bounced with amusement. "It seems your student's a good influence on you."

Kakashi did not reply to the jab, instead he just gave him a lazy stare with his ever-droopy eye and pressed on, "I was told you have a mission for the both of us?"

The older man nodded in thought as he pushed a few papers around on his desk until he found the ones he wanted. He held the stack out to Sakura but addressed Kakashi.

"I need you for this one, Kakashi-kun. It's politically delicate, and they asked for only the best. And since Haruno-san is still here, she will just have to go with you." He motioned for her to read it over the paper. "You *are* a Konoha shinobi—an ANBU at that. That tattoo ensures your dedication to the Hokage. To this village. Can I assume I can use your services?"

Hiruzen Sarutobi was certainly *not* her favorite Hokage, but Sakura nodded, nonetheless. "Of course, Hokage-sama. I'd be happy too."

The older man smiled around his pipe. "Good. In the meantime, I will keep my patrols on the lookout for any of your comrades and will alert you if there is any change. But for now, I need you both."

Sakura read aloud, "*By request of the Fire Daimyo: An A-Rank mission to escort and protect his five year old daughter, Hikari, from Konohagakure to the Fire Capital.*"

Sakura continued reading ahead.

"It says the girl and her mother stopped here after returning from the Land of Steam where they were on holiday. The Daimyo believes a threat was made against him that specifically mentions the girl as the intended target. Therefore, the mother and a decoy will be sent ahead with a large group to draw attention, and we will travel an alternative route behind them."

The Hokage hummed in agreement. "It's about an eight-hour run at top speed to get from here to the Fire Capital, and the mother and the decoy guard have already left. They are planning to camp out for the night along the way. The two of you and the girl will leave at first light and should arrive around the same time. Move quickly and return the girl in one piece."

His eyes met with theirs with a weighted gaze.

"I must warn you. There is a lot of unknown information on this—the Daimyo wasn't very transparent about the threat itself or the scale of danger the girl may be in. He only said to leave no survivors if attacked. I can only tell you to prepare for nothing—and *everything*—to go wrong."

Sakura handed the papers back to him as she cast a side glance at Kakashi. He was as aloof as always, hand in his pocket and not a worry in the world.

"Understood, Hokage-sama." The Copy-Nin replied.

He puffed silently for a few seconds and waved a hand at an ANBU that was standing in the corner of the room. The ANBU approached with a standard uniform and a porcelain mask as they handed it to her.

"Take it. When I heard you were Naruto-kun's friend I thought it might suit you." The Hokage paused, as his eyes looked away, almost ashamed. "You see no other ANBU will wear it, for they believe it is bad luck."

Sakura took the Fox mask in her arms, and traced the large ears and grinning snout of her new ANBU identity with a gentle finger. The same three whisker-like lines stretch across the mask's cheek just like Naruto's.

She thought of her friend's childhood, and the failure of the man in front of her. The isolation. The sadness. She would wear those thoughts like the greatest armor.

She smiled wryly and huffed a laugh at the Hokage. "Well, their loss then. Foxes have protected me so far; I doubt they'll stop now."

The older man gave a slight smile and his eyes grew warm with fondness. He gripped the rim of his large white Hokage hat, and pulled it down to block his eyes.

"I'll leave it to you then." His gravelly voice seemed a little bit heavier to Sakura. She felt satisfaction at his discomfort.

*Good.* Sakura thought to herself, *I hope he's filled with regrets.*

The next morning, Kakashi was trying to be firm in moving at his own pace, but Sakura was not having it.

The pink-haired menace was determined to be on time, and she set herself a personal mission to get him out of bed as fast as she could.

She tried (and failed) to rip the blanket from him. She threw several pillows at him—to which he blocked expertly even in a drowsy state. She poked and prodded him in all the ticklish areas she could find—but Kakashi was unmoving and restrained. She even threatened to remove his mask if he didn't get up—but Kakashi knew she respected his boundaries enough to where she wouldn't.

It wasn't until she coerced Bull to come and sit directly on his diaphragm which instantly restricted his breathing—did Kakashi finally sit up and start moving for the day.

They both dressed in their ANBU gear and donned their porcelain masks, leaving '*Kakashi and Sakura*' at the door and becoming '*Hound and Fox*'.

And she looked *good*.

With his tanto strapped on her back and the cunning smile of her Fox mask gleaming in mischief—she looked natural. Like this uniform was a second skin she desperately missed.

Her back was a little straighter. Her steps a little more sure. He stared at the Fox mask from the corner of his eye, and he wondered if she felt a little freer—just like him.

With a focused silence, the two shinobi were out the door and at the gates by the time the first ray of sunlight was glowing pink on the horizon. Kakashi droopily glared at the pink light with a sudden aversion to anything that resembled the color.

Minutes later, an unfamiliar looking Chunin approached with a little girl.

She was what you'd expect of a Daimyo's daughter—polite, a tad spoiled, and a little bit haughty. She was as cute as any child that age, but not overly beautiful. Despite that, it was easy to see she was 'well bred', as they say.

She was dressed in an expensive looking lavender yukata with large childish pink flowers on it that was wrapped in a darker purple obi. Her brown hair was neatly swept into two low pigtails, and little hair pins with bunny rabbits were crossed in her bangs.

She bowed politely to the Chunin and turned to face the ANBU before her. For one so young, she didn't seem intimidated or frightened by the ominous masks staring back at her. Instead, her big brown eyes smiled in an eager grin.

"You must be Hound-kun and Fox-chan!" She spoke with a small but direct voice. "Please bring me home safely!"

Sakura stifled a laugh underneath her mask. He could hear her smile in her voice, "We plan to Hikari-chan. When you're ready, Hound-kun will carry you on his back, okay?"

The little girl squealed in excitement and ran to his side with a little jump. Kakashi held a hand out with his palm up—like a prince welcoming their princess.

She took his hand with a huge grin stretching from ear to ear, and a slight blush. He hoisted her up with one hand and swung her onto his back. She instantly grabbed his shoulders tight.

"Forward march, Hound-kun!" she said with a small finger pointing past his head and her eyes gleaming.

Kakashi gave Sakura a tired glance, before motioning for her to run point. He told the girl to hold on tight, and then they were off. He and Sakura ran at full speed for several hours while Hikari happily chatted away on his back.

She spoke about anything and everything that came to her mind—sometimes questions like *why they wore weird masks?*—other times stories like her onsen holiday to the Land of Steam. Or his personal favorite: *'why is his hair grey when he doesn't seem like an old man?'*

She *contemplated, challenged, and described* the whole of the universe within those few hours.

Kakashi was mildly impressed at her never-ending ability to speak, and was equally worn out by it too.

Sakura, on the other hand, seemed thoroughly amused and prompted many answers and questions from the young girl. He silently thanked

the gods that Sakura was there to run interference for him—he certainly never claimed to be good with children.

By the time the sun was well into the sky, they stopped to rest near a small stream in the dense part of the forest. Despite being midday, the small clearing was shaded and covered with the growth of the trees around it.

The soft sage of trees reflected on the water of the stream, and everything smelled of foliage and dry dirt as it had not rained in days. It had been a hot and humid summer, and all three of them were sweating and could use a break.

He placed her down gently and stretched to straighten his back slowly. *Maybe he was getting old?*

Shaking the thought from his head, he immediately summoned his pack. With their communal poof, the group appeared and readied for orders.

"Yo, Boss! Boss La—*Pink Lady!* ...and a little pup?" questioned Pakkun with his head cocked.

Hikari squealed and raced towards the canines with elation. They greeted her just as enthusiastically.

"Our mission is to protect the girl. Can you run a perimeter for us?"

"No problem, Boss." The pug sat down and scratched his ear with his hind leg. The others released the small girl from their assault of licks and sniffs. With a gruff yip they all fell in order and awaited their Alpha's command. "Move out!"

He watched the pack disappear into the forest. Hikari sighed in disappointment and moved to the stream to splash her feet in the water. Kakashi noticed Sakura walk toward him.

"Let me massage your back really quick." She demanded softly while already shoving him down to the ground in a sitting position.

Her Fox mask grinned slyly back at him. The Copy-nin suddenly missed jade eyes and the easy smile. He gruffed a protest, but she held him down firmly.

"I'm fine. What's a massage going to do anyway?"



She laughed haughtily. "See these...? These are *magic hands*, Hound. I know you're used to slouching, but even your posture must hurt after carrying her for hours. So, either take the massage or let me carry her—which one?"

He didn't reply, so she spoke candidly with a soft voice.

"You don't have to do everything alone. You called me your teammate; so, let me be one to you—Let me help."

After a long moment of debate, Kakashi grunted in agreement. He flexed his sore shoulders under her hands, and she took this as a sign to go on. He felt her small, but firm hands began their work. She dragged them down to the base of his spine and started kneading and pinning the muscles of his back with chakra laced hands.

...Kakashi tried not to enjoy it. He really *really* wanted to say it was nothing special. But even he knew that lie would be too big.

He practically melted into her hands like he'd seen Pakkun melt after an overdose of tummy rubs. She must have done this for him before, because she seemed to know *exactly* how to touch him. And as much as he inwardly hated being read so easily, he was instead very *very* grateful. Her green chakra soothed and relaxed all of the tension from his back, and her scent of summer berries and jasmine wrapped around him calmly—if he was honest, he felt better than he had in years.

He was so focused on his relief; his thoroughness in his descent into relaxation—that he didn't scent the intruders that smelled of dried mud and traces of petrichor that came from somewhere foreign.

He didn't notice it—

until the sound of an exploding tag went off somewhere north of their location.

His nose twitched. It was far enough that he couldn't see the cause of it, but close enough that he knew their perimeter was breached.

Kakashi instantly jumped into action. He grabbed Hikari by the collar of her yukata and practically threw her at Sakura. Sakura (thankfully) predicted this and caught her with awaiting arms and told the girl to quietly hold on.

They started to move upstream, but it was only mere seconds later

Kakashi heard a yelp and resounding thud as Pakkun flew limply across the stream and slammed into a tree.

The resounding *crack!* of the impact echoed in his ears. The dog wasn't moving, but he was letting out small painful whines. Kakashi felt those whimpers in his blood.

Rage flooded him. His eye pulsed beneath his mask.

His sight followed the trajectory that the dog flew to the other side of the stream.

There, stood a tall heavily built man with his leg hiked up as if he just punted a ball across a field.

His dirty boots were packed with dried mud, although no puddles were in sight. He wore standard combat pants and a loose haori with nothing underneath so that his musculature was on display. In his hands was a large double-sided spear that was smeared with blood.

On his forehead sat the symbol of Kumogakure.

Kakashi noticed several other chakra signatures moving in around them—some already in contact with his pack.

The foreign nin was much larger than Kakashi as far as pure muscle, but the Copy-Nin wasted no time in his assault. He rushed forward towards the man, and took note of Sakura splitting in the opposite direction towards Pakkun.

He trusted her to look after his pack, so he didn't spare a glance backwards.

She wanted to be his teammate? *Fine.*

“...You better not die then Fox,” he mumbled to himself.

With his chidori already chirping readily, he pushed ahead to end this as quickly as possible.

~~~~~ さくら ~~~~~

Sakura knelt beside the injured ninken with a glowing hand.

She wasn't a veterinarian, but even she knew what broken ribs looked like on any animal. He was wheezing heavily, most likely one rib pierced a lung. The medic-nin immediately slid Hikari off her back and clasped her hands together to form her chakra.

She would have to be careful with her chakra usage—every little bit would have to be precisely divided among her tasks and used wisely.

Sakura certainly didn't have the largest chakra reserves, but she was *very* good at stretching it without wasting any excess.

After making two simple clones with as little of her chakra as she could, she inwardly instructed one clone to heal Pakkun just enough to ensure stability. The other, she instructed to henge into a fake Hikari.

The real Sakura turned towards the little girl who was crouching next to the injured pup. Kneeling down to her level, she placed both hands on the young girl's shoulders and waited for the girl to meet her eyes.

"Hikari-chan, things are about to get messy. I want you to stay here with Pakkun—don't touch him as he's very very hurt—but stay near him and this tree. No matter what, you must not move or make any sound. Do you understand? *Stay quiet, and stay still.*"

She tried to sound reassuring, but she saw the girl's eyes well up in tears. Her bottom lip trembled and her shoulders were shaking slightly, but she nodded in spite of it.

"Good girl," she patted the girl's head.

Taking a paper seal out of her hip pouch, Sakura cast a simple camouflage-esque genjutsu and slapped them on Hikari's and the clone's back. It would keep them hidden from sight as long as they didn't move too much.

Rough and a little clumsy. It obviously wasn't ideal, but she needed to move onto her next task.

She pulled out her *White Fang* tanto from the sheath on her back with one hand, its shrill of the silver-white blade made her heart rate quicken.

Sakura bent down quickly to let the Hikari-clone climb onto her back

and started moving towards the ringing of a thousand birds chirping—the sound was instilled in her, she would know it anywhere.

She didn't make it far. Just enough distance to keep the group with Pakkun safe from a fight but still within sight, before three—*no, four*—shinobi arrived within visible range.

It seemed like they were a five-man cell with their leader engaging Kakashi. These other four seemed much weaker in comparison based on just pure chakra levels.

But then again, *her* chakra levels were deceiving too.

"Give us the girl." A woman with pale blonde hair that was coiled in two tight buns on top of her head, stood high on a branch in front of Sakura. Around her neck sat a Kumo hitai-ate.

"*Sure*," Sakura purred. "All you have to do is take her."

Taunting was always a bad habit of hers, but it helped that most people underestimated her based on her stature alone.

Her grip tightened on her tanto while eyeing the two other men circling around her threateningly.

The third man—tall, absurdly lanky—came out of the trees. He landed near the blond. The man was all limbs and smiles. He wore a creepy twisted grin that was laced with lust, and slick as oil towards his blonde counterpart. He leaned towards the woman's shoulder to give it a reverent kiss. Something about him felt slimy to Sakura.

"*Oh*, what a lovely Pink Fox." Sakura skin crawled at his tone. "I bet she has a *bite*! ...Why don't we play with her a little bit, baby?"

He cooed against the blonde's skin, but his eyes locked on Sakura.

The man's smile twisted even deeper at his taunt towards her as he licked a wet stripe from the woman's shoulder to the top of her neck, all while staring at Sakura. The blonde woman purred in a content agreement.

Sakura gagged internally but kept her eyes on him. *Okay, gross.*

"Close your eyes, Hikari. You don't want to see this," she said, louder than necessary. She was speaking to the clone on her back, but she quietly hoped the real Hikari heard too.

The man closest to her—one of the foot soldiers—decided to attack at her declaration.

Sakura wasted no time—she side stepped from his messy punch as she used her free hand to push his head down, while her chakra-infused knee came up to pummel his face.

A sickening crunch echoed in the clearing. The man collapsed in a heap on the floor—his face smashed in. Skull in pieces.

The clearing was eerily silent.

The remaining three shinobi watched in silent horror.

I know, she thought to herself with a smirk. *The first one always tends to shock.*

The second nin charged in a moment later while attempting to thrust a kunai into her left kidney. She probably could have blocked it with her open hand, but the Hikari clone was slipping off her back, so she decided to just slash with her tanto. It was much messier, but she was busy adjusting the girl on her back.

With a glint of silver-white, the nin's hand fell to the floor while still holding the incoming kunai. Blood was splattering everywhere, but Sakura paid little mind to it.

Without a second thought, she lifted the tanto again and sliced the carotid artery of his neck.

It slid silently and surely—with no resistance.

The blood sprayed around him, but she ignored it and pressed on to the two lovers in front of her.

She watched their wide eyes, and matching grimaces. They abruptly lost their laid-back attitude and prepared for a defense.

That's right, she purred internally. *It's not a fluke.*

Somewhere behind them, she could hear the clash of metal and sounds of another battle beyond them.

Sakura wanted to get to Kakashi quickly; just two more to go.

She kept her eyes focused on the two Kumo nin in front of her: the Creepy-thin-man had not lost his slimy grin (much to her

disappointment), but the blond next to him looked thoroughly enraged.

And afraid.

"How *dare* you?!" the blond screeched. "You're going to pay! My fireflies will eat you alive! *Raiton: Hotaru no jutsu!*"

The Cloud kunoichi shook off the man's touch on her shoulder and charged at Sakura. He did not follow his lover, instead the vile man stayed back and watched with his grin.

With a series of hand signs, the blonde created small floating electrical charges that floated around her that did, in fact, look like blinking fireflies.

A few flew forward ahead of her and straight at Sakura. She dodged the first few, but as they landed on the ground a burst of electricity exploded around them, causing Sakura to jump back a little further.

It was a half-decent raiton jutsu, but Sakura had obviously seen better.

She dodged the incoming charges with ease, and threw a few senbon as distraction.

Thankfully, Sakura had an affinity from both water and earth based jutsu—and Future-Kakashi had taken the time to teach her a few, including his *Headhunter* jutsu. She may not be skilled enough to erect walls of earth—but *oh*, how she loved this one jutsu. It was a terribly useful thing.

She disappeared beneath earth and pulled the blond down under with her, until only the woman's head remained above ground.

With the senbon in her hand, she used her foot to tilt the woman's neck forward until the back of her head was exposed. The woman screamed and shrieked violently.

Sakura inserted the senbon surgically below the skull and pierced the spinal cord and into the brain.

The screams ceased. It was as merciful as Sakura could be at the moment.

Before she could turn to face the Creepy-thin-man, his hysterical laugh

was already echoing in the clearing. He didn't seem all that upset.

Sakura's lips turned up in a snarl of disgust behind her Fox mask. She's had enough of the crazy people in this world.

"Oooh, what a Fox. You're not all talk after all~!" the Creepy-thin-man laughed with eyes turned upwards in thin crescents. "You know, I quite liked her—*she was an easy fuck*—and an even *easier* tool to use."

He threw a few kunai at her noncommittally. Sakura parried them off with ease. He chuckled.

"Too bad for you I don't play fair—see I have a really good nose, maybe even better than the damn Inuzuka clan you Leaf people keep bragging about—and my nose is saying there is something really *sweet* hiding over there!"

Sakura followed his trailing eyes to the tree behind her. Air stalled in her lungs as she watched in panic as the man lazily threw a kunai with an exploding tag tied to it in the direction of the hidden Pakkun and Hikari.

She pumped chakra into her legs and moved so fast towards the kunai, that it ended up popping the clone on her back. With the used bloody senbon still in hand, Sakura threw it as hard as she could to intercept the tag.

She watched it fly—chakra propelled.

With a silent prayer, she held her breath and watched the trajectory of her weapon.

It made contact. *Oh, thank the gods.*

She was pleased to see her aim was on point, and the kunai was deflected in the perpendicular direction. Sakura quietly thanked her foresight to take all those extra lessons with Genma and Tenten.

As soon as she saw it was deflected, Sakura planted her front foot with chakra—she pivoted her weight of the balls of her feet and burst forward toward the Creepy-thin-man without any wasted movement.

The exploding tag burst behind her as its boom echoed around the forest floor. She paid no attention to the sound.

Creepy-thin-man smiled, much to Sakura's disappointment.

“I want to see what’s behind that lovely mask, Fox.” He licked his lips.
Ew.

He performed some kind of doton earth wall jutsu she had seen many times since the Fourth Shinobi War, but this wall was much softer and clay-like.

It was also much *much* thicker. *Mud?*

Without a second thought, Sakura pulled back a fist and thrust it into the wall with all her strength. She was hoping to crack it, crumble it, turn it to dust—but it ended up sort of just splattering everywhere as large chunks of mud and clay exploded around her.

Her fist didn’t even make it through the wall.

So, she pushed, and *she pushed*—flooding her chakra into the wall to somehow make it to the other side.

And when she was able to push through it, Sakura could already see that the setback had cost her precious seconds.

He had made a doton clone with his extra time—to her absolute dismay, there were now *two* Creepy-thin-men (two times the disgust). Both were primed to attack her as soon as she appeared on the other side of the thick wall.

One had a kunai. The other was reaching towards her mask.

She side stepped one as his kunai grazed her arm, but she let him pass. Instead, she chose to focus on the other going for her mask: she slid forward as she brought her hand to the man's throat and crushed his windpipe with nothing but her bare strength.

The man's eyes bulged as he made a gargled sound of surprise before falling limp in her hand.

The corpse melted into mud between her fingers, she clicked her tongue in annoyance for mistakenly choosing the clone.

What a sloppy mistake, she reprimanded herself.

Sakura was already turning towards what she assumed was the real Creepy-thin-man with tanto in hand, and ready to strike...

...when she felt the air shift—

The Creepy-thin-man had his arm raised high in the air with a kunai over his head about to bring it down towards her chest.

She was in no real danger. It wouldn't have been hard to block, but—
...But then with a poof of silent smoke—there was Kakashi.

He was crouched on the man's shoulders with his feet perched on each side of the man's head. His glowing red Sharingan was swirling threateningly behind a blood splattered Hound mask.

He made no sound; there was no notion of his existence.

Except—

His killing intent.

It was wrapping around them—coiling, suffocating them menacingly.

Like someone was choking the air out of her lungs. Her body reacted without her consent, and a cold sweat was already forming on her brow. She felt her lungs burn as though she had forgotten to breathe. And her own shoulders tensed and felt heavy as if his weight was resting on her, and not on the enemy nin.

He didn't look human. He looked otherworldly—a reaper, perhaps.

A terrifyingly Grim. Reluctant. Fallen...*Reeeaper*.

A demonic storm of strength, power, and intelligence—and a deliverer of *death*.

He wore death like a cloak, a shroud of black that followed him wherever he went—unforgiving to his victims but reeking of his own regrets and remorse. A role he couldn't escape. A chain bound to his soul.

It was like his flesh melted, and only his bones remained. A skull of a face with mismatching eyes in empty sockets, and a bisecting scar that was cut to the bone.

Sakura had faced nightmares. She knew of evil monsters, and immortal ghosts.

And Kakashi—when he really wanted to be—*was all of that and more*.

He didn't hesitate. Sakura wondered if he was even thinking at all, or

if it was just all instinct that was instilled in him after years and years of cold-hearted killing.

Maybe this is why shinobi shouldn't live too long.

She watched as Kakashi gripped the wrist of the man that was holding the kunai. The Creepy-thin-man dropped it—maybe Kakashi had simply snapped his wrist, or maybe it was the pure fear of the demon resting on his shoulders—either way, the man jolted with a guttural scream.

After successfully thwarting the man's attack, Kakashi let go of the man's wrist. With two hands he grasped his own kunai above his head...

Sakura watched in an attentive daze.

Time seemed to crawl as she admired his long, beautiful fingers as they did their work. A strange attraction. Like looking over the edge of a cliff and wanting to jump off.

...and plunged it down, piercing the man's throat in a violent thrust.

She watched the man's eyes go wide as they met her own. His blood gargled and erupted from his mouth. Blood sprayed, and she felt the warmth of it splatter on her.

A slimy grin was still planted on his face—even as the light faded from his eyes.

She silently wished she could have been the one to wipe that disgusting smile off his face.

She watched as Kakashi jumped off the man's shoulders just as the body collapsed into a heap of flesh and blood. It pooled around the toes of her sandals. She still did not move.

He immediately surveyed the clearing, and turned to her with his one red glowing eye. Sakura gulped a large breath of air and exhaled it slowly. She needed to breathe normally again. She wiped her tanto on her ANBU shirt and began to sheath it.

Adrenaline was still pumping in her body. Kakashi seemed to have the same affliction—as he was still looking tense and ready to fight. His Hound mask seemed to glower at their surroundings.

But she ignored that for now, and walked straight past him towards

Pakkun.

~~~~~ かかし ~~~~~

Kakashi watched as Pakkun sat up at the pink-haired medic's approach.

The small dog still looked heavily injured, but it seemed like Sakura was able to stabilize him. What a relief. The Copy-nin would never admit it openly, but maybe Sakura was right about ANBU needing medic nin.

Several others of his pack were approaching the clearing: Bull had a net still tangled on his hind legs. Urushi had a small bear trap lodge in his front paw. But the others looked mostly okay.

Pakkun gave an affectionate lick to Sakura's hand when she walked up to check him. After a moment, she stood up and walked past the dog to face a nearby tree.

He watched the pink-haired kunoichi lift one hand and muttered a quiet *'kai'*. The genjutsu seal broke—the little girl and a clone were revealed.

The clone popped. The little girl shuddered.

And there—like a small, frightened animal—cowered the small girl.

She was crouched in a ball with her face buried in her knees. One hand was covering her head, and the other was curled up in a tight fist at her mouth. Huge, wet tears were pouring from her big brown eyes, and she was shaking silently. She was biting on her knuckle to stifle her sobs.

Kakashi noticed the pierced skin and small drops of blood that welled on the girl's knuckle when she finally released it from her mouth. It must have been a last resort to keep herself quiet. Only when her mouth was finally free, did she find her voice.

She wailed loudly and honestly, as only children could do—without any reservation or shame.

Snot and drool were running down her face. Her little shoulders trembled violently, and her face contorted through a flood of tears. She gasped for breath when she could.

And Sakura did what he assumed any mother would do at the sight of a crying child; she moved to comfort her.

Despite every ANBU regulation, Sakura removed her Fox mask and quietly knelt beside the girl. Her mouth was set in a tight straight line, and her green eyes were glowing with a steady calm gaze that never wavered from the little girl's.

"It's okay, Hikari-chan. You did so good," she spoke with a slow, soothing voice. She gently patted the girl's head, and repeated herself, "You did so good. *So good.*"

Hikari's bottom lip trembled in relief, and she attempted to stifle her sobs. She was just starting to slow her breathing down. But then her eyes shifted away from Sakura's for a moment and met his over Sakura's arm.

The effect was immediate.

Her face contorted again, and new sobs were crashing into the old ones. Sakura's emerald eyes questioningly followed her path to find him.

The pink-haired nin rolled her eyes and sighed in disbelief.

"Hey, don't worry about him," Sakura told the girl. Frustration laced her voice. "I know he looks scary, but he's not going to hurt you. I promise."

*Was she talking about me?* Kakashi questioned internally.

He looked down to survey himself—there was blood splattered everywhere on his body. He was still holding a stained kunai that he used only moments ago to kill with. And he had forgotten his Sharingan was still activated. His body was still tense and poised to fight, and he was sure his bloodlust was still oozing out of him.

Kakashi frowned beneath his Hound mask.

The cleaning of the blood would have to wait, but he put away his kunai and he followed Sakura's lead by removing his porcelain mask. He even kept his left eye closed and tried to curb his bloodlust.

The little girl watched him with large cautious eyes, she was still crying softly and gripping Sakura's shirt tightly. The pink kunoichi just hummed quietly, and her soft eyes met his again. She smiled at his attempt to appease the girl.

"*Listen*," she hissed out curtly. She turned to face the girl, but Kakashi had the strangest feeling she was also speaking to him.

"You see that blood-soaked *idiot* over there?" she said to the girl. She lifted the girl's chin slightly, so their eyes met. "He's....he's someone very important to me. He's been by my side when everyone else left me behind...He's fought by my side; he's bled by my side. He even *died* at my side one time, and he *still* came back to stand by me."

She paused and her lips twitched before she gave a dazzling smile. Kakashi felt a nervous flutter in his stomach. He couldn't help but watch the woman in silent astonishment.

"We have faced *everything* together—even defying a *god* together. And he has always, *always* had my back. He's stupidly loyal—just like the doggies he plays with. And it makes him the *best* teammate in the whole world."

The little girl smiled through a snuffle.

"And I trust him more than I trust anyone else in this world..." her voice quieted to a soft purr. Sakura's green eyes turned to search his, the alluring little smile still dancing on her lips. "There's nothing to worry about, because I'm going to protect *you*—and he's going to protect *me*. Do you understand?"

It was a bold assumption of his character. Kakashi did not refute it—he knew she was right. There was an innate need to protect his teammates, especially her it seemed.

He wanted to be the person she spoke of—the person to always be by her side.

The young girl gave a long look between the two shinobi, after a hiccup and snuffle the girl nodded.

Sakura ruffled her hair in response, and chuckled as she wiped the girl's face with her gloved hands. When she was done, the medic-nin stood and took a few steps towards Kakashi.

Her hand was outstretched with green glowing chakra and halfway to

reaching him, when he caught the feeling of an enemy chakra signature behind him.

Her expression shifted and her eyes grew sharp at whatever was behind him...

...he heard the beginning of a scream from the girl behind Sakura.

Kakashi was about to react, but her green cloaked hand dissipated its chakra and instead, shoved him straight back. He could do very little to resist the pure strength of the push—her chakra pulsed in him and propelled him backwards.

He could see it, as he was falling back—a spear, just like the one he plunged into the Kumo-nin's stomach only minutes ago, flew straight where he was standing.

...and *straight into Sakura*.

It pierced through her chest plate, and into her heart.

Kakashi felt the air leave his lungs. It was like it got stuck in his throat and it *burned*.

He saw Rin. Then Obito. And Minato and Kushina. Even that kid Haku, that he had killed in the Land of Waves. It's like he's seen it a million times, the same image—over and over again. A hole in the chest. Blood splattering around them—or on him.

Darkness was creeping up on the edges of his vision.

By the time his back hit the ground a few feet away from her—

He was already gone to the world.

And by the time he regained any sense of self—

He was standing above a decapitated corpse, *with a severed head in his hand*.

~~~~~ さくら ~~~~~

Sakura could see it from the corner of her eye.

The big bulky man that had kicked Pakkun rose out of the water of the stream, like a spectre rising from the fog.

His body was mangled and tattered. He was missing one arm, and had several kunai buried in his back. In between his shoulder and neck was a large, mutilated bite mark—most likely a gift from one of Kakashi's hounds. Not to mention a gap in his torso that she was sure entrails could be seen even from her distance away.

Blood was pouring out of him and leaking into the surrounding water. It looked unreal, to see a half-living corpse taint and murk the clear water of the stream.

She could only watch as he hurled his huge spear like a javelin, with what must have been the last of his strength, as he toppled over as soon as it left his hand. It flew straight and true towards its target—so Sakura reacted as she would like to think any decent person would.

She shoved Kakashi out of the way and took a huge, gaping hole to the chest.

And—oh, gods—it hurts, Sakura thought.

The force of the spear sent her on her back, and she could feel it pierce into her heart. She only had seconds—

Okay, maybe less than a second.

So, she released her byakugou seal. She could feel the cool rush of it as it spread along some places and crossed in others in its trailing design. It always left goose bumps on her skin.

And with whatever strength Sakura could manage—she put two hands on the monstrous spear, and she *pulled*.

If she had any chance of healing, she couldn't do it with a foreign object in her body. The pay off, however, was that now the gaping hole was gushing out blood. And her lungs were filling with fluid.

She couldn't breathe—she tried to gasp for air, but it ended up being a gargled splutter of blood that poured from her mouth. She could feel the droplets spray back on her face since she was lying down. She was drowning in her own body, and everything *burned*.

Long slow tears were leaking from her eyes and down her cheeks—and she tried, *really tried*—to just focus on breathing.

She had never regrown part of her own heart before.

Arteries, valves, atriums, ventricles...

It was actually extraordinary, to feel the muscle fibers sew themselves together again, and start functioning again. She could feel new cells bursting into existence—bone regrowing and new skin stretching to meet the old.

Her heart reformed itself while barely managing to hold on to its beat
—

And before long, a new rhythm had started and replaced the old.

She felt a moist lap of a tongue against the tears on her face. Someone was saying something, but she couldn't make it out.

The fluid in her lungs was another unfortunate problem.

She could barely move, but with a shaky hand she reached down to her med-pouch strapped to her thigh. She grabbed a senbon and small catheter tube she kept for emergencies. Without thought, she stabbed the senbon in her chest wall deep enough to where it pierced her left lung and inserted the catheter.

She sat up coughing violently, blood still oozing from her mouth, and took the other end of the tube to her mouth to provide suction. Fluid began moving through the tube and out of her lung. She spit blood out beside her and took long wheezing breaths—tears were still rolling down her cheeks without her permission.

It wasn't long after that she felt a small wet lick again on the arm that was propping her up.

"Boss-Lady...I have no idea what you did...but I'm sure glad you're not dead." Pakkun nuzzled her arm with his head. His tail was wagging beneath him. "I know you're busy tryin' not to die n' all, but you may want to do something about that one over there..." He bobbed his head over toward the stream. "It's *not* good."

Sakura followed his motion with exhausted, squinting eyes. Her chest was still heaving, and deep wet coughs were rasping loudly. Blood and tears still seemed to slowly drip from her mouth and eyes.

But—

Kakashi was standing over the corpse with a vacant, glazed stare. He held the head of the Kumo-nin in one hand and a bloody kunai in the other.

He looked unnaturally still, like time had frozen around him. She couldn't even tell if he was still breathing.

Sakura coughed up a little more blood, as she spit it out to try and speak.

"A-Ah,...Let...m-me..." She struggled, her voice was a strangled whisper.

Her throat and lungs were still painful despite healing well. She rolled over and pushed her way up to kneeling—and then to standing—as slow as she could manage. With a shaky walk she made her way over to Kakashi.

She didn't touch him yet; she knew enough PTSD episodes to know he'll let her know when he was ready for physical contact. So, she spoke with a low and as soothing of a voice she could conduct with her healing lungs.

"K-Ka...shi." She wheezed and closed her eyes, to try again. "...*kashi*."

"K-Kakashi....*look at me*..." He did not, but she pressed on. "I'm...fine—or I will be fine...I'm *alive*."

She took in a deep shaky breath. "I'm okay...I didn't die, my seal kept me alive."

He still wasn't moving, but his blank eyes shifted to the mark on her forehead. And slowly, they traveled down to the injury on her chest and back up to her eyes.

She moved slowly at first, so to not startle him—with a gentle hand she removed the kunai from his grasp, and let it drop into the water below them. And then she moved to the next hand, and uncurled his fingers from the hair of the man's head. It too dropped below.

She didn't let go of his hand this time, instead she softly brought his fingers to the newly formed scar on her chest. There was a huge hole in her shirt and chest plate now that showcased the scar nestled between her solar plexus and the inner side of her breast. Her chest

was still rising steadily in shaky breaths.

His fingers traced the raised skin tenderly, and Sakura heard his breath hitch. She squeezed her eyes closed and tried to choose her words carefully.

"I know... *I know*—you can't afford to lose anyone else." She tried to smile up at him, but the damn tears still hadn't stopped rolling down her cheeks, even if the wheezing had finally had.

"*I won't leave you*," she affirmed. His eyes flickered to hers—Sakura was growing more and more fond of his mismatched eyes. Her fingers tightened on his at her chest. "You still have fifteen years of the future ahead of you, and I can't promise it's not without loss....but none of those losses will be *me*. I never left you through all of that, and I will never leave you now. Do you understand?"

He swallowed thickly. His hand pulled away from her scar and moved up to her cheek. With a swipe of his thumb, he brushed off a stray tear.

He leaned forward—maybe it was more of a slump forward—as it seemed like all the built up stress and fear melted away.

He was so tall, Sakura felt like he was towering over her—as he rested his forehead on the little purple diamond that was on hers. She could feel his warm breath on her face, as he let out a breathless sigh.

Sakura's heart stuttered again in her chest—and she wondered vaguely, if it was fair to do that to a brand new heart.

"Yeah," he said with a low breathy voice that made chills run up Sakura's spine. "*I understand*."

~~~~~ かかし ~~~~~

Kakashi felt comically exhausted.

His mental and physical physique were in shambles at the moment. He had several gashes from that obscene spear and his chakra levels

were eating away with his Sharingan.

He was honestly trying not to collapse on her. But she didn't need to know that.

And to top it all off, he almost mourned another comrade. Or at least—what the future promised to be his comrade.

He watched her die, and yet...here she was...whole and *alive*.

Thanks to a little magic rhombus—one that Kakashi could literally kiss at the moment out of gratitude. Its black crossing lines were still running down her face and body, and Kakashi couldn't help but admire the '*Strength of a Hundred*' Seal.

It was a force of reckoning—just like her.

He didn't want to move from her yet, but she was ever the reliable combat-medic: Sakura set straight to work.

"Kakashi, I need you to help me get back to Hikari-chan. I can't heal you right now, but I can bandage you up."

With nothing but a grunt as a response, Kakashi grabbed her arm and threw it over his shoulder and placed his other arm on her hip. Together, they walked—or hobbled by supporting each other's weight—back towards the girl as they both mutually made sure each other didn't keel over.

The little girl was watching them with big watery eyes and a trembling lip, but no tears—as if she had finally run out of them.

She was grasping onto Pakkun's vest, and her tiny arms were entangled around the dog's neck in a fierce grip. To his surprise, the grumpy canine-nin allowed it with little protest.

Sakura greeted them both and checked them over with an expert eye. Kakashi zoned it out as sat down and brought a hand to a particularly nasty gash on his stomach.

It wasn't long before the pink-haired nin turned her attentiveness back towards him. She cleaned, stitched, and wrapped every gash she could find with the supplies from her med-pack. And when she was done, she smiled a worn out little smile.

She turned to him, waiting for his full attention. He gave it freely.

"Don't freak out..." she said as her eyelids fluttered weakly.

Her hand reached down and yanked out a tube that he hadn't noticed—small flecks of blood flew off it to Kakashi's alarm. He was about to protest, but the inky black lines on her skin started fading fast.

"—but the seal is about to revert. And when it does... I-I'm pretty sure I'm going...to pass ou—..." Her eyes rolled back and her whole body tilted sideways.

Kakashi was able to stop her falling over, and laid her down softly on the ground. He straightened himself and ran a frustrated hand through his silver hair.

After a long moment of internal debate, the Copy-nin looked at the little girl and Pakkun.

"We're on a timeline, Pak. Do you think I could borrow Bull?"

*Fuck, he was tired.*

"Sure thing, Boss. I'm sure Bull won't mind a little over-time," Pakkun panted. "Leave the rest of the pack to me. We'll head home for now." He licked the little girl's arm as a sign to release him. The girl silently obliged.

The pug limped over to Sakura's form and licked her cheek affectionately. "She did good, Boss. You should have seen her."

"I *know*," he said simply. "I'm not surprised in the least."

And he wasn't. At least—not by her—but instead by himself.

Kakashi took in the battle ground around him.

Three corpses that weren't his kills: A bashed in face. A slit throat. A head half submerged in the ground.

All of them were skilled kills. Precise. Efficient.

*She would have been fine on her own.* His gut tightened in a queasy roll. His eye lids dipped half-mast, and his jaw locked in remorse.

But he had to be in control. Because of his ego. He had to be the hero rushing in. Always rushing—even when he tried to be slow and lazy—to make sure no one else died.

The story of his life: trying to be a hero and only making things worse.

It's his fault she was hurt. Because of *him*.

With gentle fingers, Kakashi pushed a stray strand of bubblegum hair away from her face.

Pakkun seemed to approve the answer silently. With a gruffy bark, Bull—the biggest of the hounds—came up next to him. Pakkun barked again and was gone with a puff of smoke.

The Copy-Nin turned towards the girl, and held out an offering hand.

"I'll take care of Fox. Will you help me give Bull a walk?"

The girl nodded enthusiastically despite looking just as tired as the two of the ANBU. Kakashi picked her up, and placed her on Bull's back—she looked as if she was riding a small bear. The large dog just panted at the rider readily.

Kakashi knelt down and replaced the discarded Fox mask back on Sakura as he also replaced his own Hound mask.

He shifted her onto his back as gently as he could as he hoisted her up to where her head was laying on his shoulder gingerly.

With a nod at his companions beside him, Kakashi took off towards the Fire Capital.

*(With nothing but Sakura's little puffs of air breathing against his neck as the only thing moving him forward.)*

-

**[image]**

## Chapter End Notes

FUN FACT#1: 'Creepy-Thin-Man' is definitely stolen from Charlie's Angels (2000).

FUN FACT#2: I couldn't resist saying 'Reeeaper' as it sounds in my head like that guy in Tron: Legacy (2010) that says 'Uuuuser'. (lol sorry.)

FUN FACT#3: Cloak, death, etc. was definitely me putting the Deathly Hallows somewhere in this fic. (Also, sorry).

A/N#1: Brother is officially married. As his little sister, I'm very happy but also-  
...good luck to his new wife. He's your problem now lol.

A/N#2: almost 400 kudos??? WHAT. Thank you to all for reading/commenting! It's truly amazing to me!

See you Saturday?

# I am your Medic

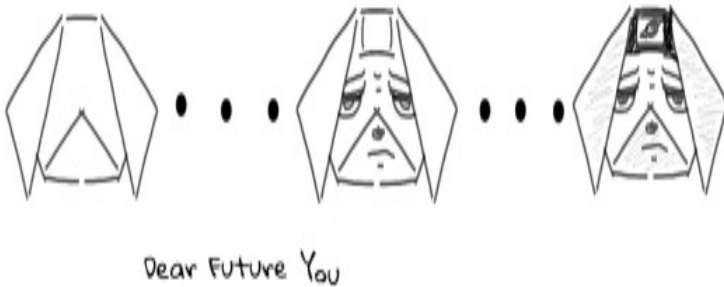
## Chapter Notes

I know last week was a heavy hitter...the next two weeks are a steep incline of added tension + dialogue...we're speeding up, and going up a hill lol (Just bear with me a bit.)

Disclaimer: I do not own any Naruto, or Naruto-adjacent media

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

[image]



[image] [image]

## Chapter 5: I am your Medic

When Sakura woke up, her eyes were still heavy and refused to open. All she could hear were nearby voices—

One of them, she recognized right away.

"Maa, she should be fine...I think?" Sakura didn't have to see him to know his eyes were probably looking at the ceiling and a hand was at the back of his neck.

"What do you mean you *'think'*? Aren't you her partner?" some woman asked with a raspy voice.

"It's sort of a new partnership."

"I see."

"...but she said 'don't freak out', so I think it's normal for her to be like this...?"

The woman sighed. "Alright. Let me call a healer to come and take care of your wounds then."

*Well, that won't do, she thought. Wake up, Sakura.*

With a scratchy cough and a dry throat, her eyes fluttered open as she tried to speak.

"H-he won't need a healer. I'll take care of him," Sakura forced out with her eyes still squeezed shut. Her voice came out raspier than expected, but at least her throat and lungs didn't feel like they were on fire anymore.

*All good signs of recovery—Excellent. Love it when I'm not dead.*

Sakura noticed they were in a traditional styled tatami room as she tried to clear her throat, and slowly shifted to sit up.

She felt the occupants of the room fix their attention on her.

Kakashi was standing next to her as she laid on top of the pompously fluffy futon in the middle of a simple, but ornate room. He looked exhausted; which was no surprise to Sakura. His silver hair was tousled and wind swept from travel, and a mixture of dried blood and dirt covered his ANBU uniform.

She noted that they both were not donning their ANBU mask for some reason, and since ANBU didn't wear hitai-ate, she came face to face with two mismatched eyes. Slightly glazed over. Definitely drooping.

He glanced over her one last time, and after being apparently pleased with her joining the land of the waking again, he slowly closed his left eye.

She could see blood was seeping through the bandages that she had tied around his torso earlier. Sakura knew she had stitched the wound clumsily before she passed out, but he must have popped the stitches on the run—to what she assumed—was the Fire Capital.

*Oh, good. We made it, she hummed to herself.*

There, next to Kakashi, was a short portly woman. Her brown hair was



swept in a perfect low bun at the nape of her neck and without a single hair out of place. Expensive kimono. Several rings on her fingers. She carried an aura of overwhelming confidence and an air elegance that made Sakura assume she was aristocracy—especially after seeing the Fire Daimyo clan's kamon on the sleeve of her kimono.

"That's ridiculous. You're half-dead, and he's bleeding out on my floor! Let me get someone—"

*"I'm his medic. No one is healing him, but me."*

The room stayed silent at that. She realized her voice came out with a little more of a bite than she had intended. She attempted to correct her impoliteness and tried again in a softer voice.

"I appreciate your concern—" *My Lady? Ma'am? Screw it.* "...but we will be fine. I've taken care of him for years. I know his body inside and out—no one is better at healing him than me."

The woman did not answer her, but instead her eyes travelled over Sakura's face with polite distaste.

"I thought you said it was a 'new' partnership..." She asked Kakashi with a raised brow.

Kakashi crinkled an eye-smile at her. "Ah, well...new on my end."

If the lady thought it was odd, she didn't say. She just smiled back politely but her eyes shifted between them both. After a moment's pause, the woman clapped both her hands together in a loud single slap.

"Well, you two are welcome to relax here for the night. I believe sometime tomorrow my husband would like to meet you with you personally. You both have our greatest gratitude for saving our daughter." She bowed slightly. "Thank you for protecting Hikari, when I could not."

Without waiting for any kind of acknowledgment or reply, the woman turned on her heels and left the room through the heavy wood sliding doors.

Kakashi didn't wait for the door to slide shut before he turned to Sakura. She beat him to it.

"Yo." She teased, as she smiled wearily up at him from her place on the futon.

"Yo, yourself." His eyes caught the torn opening of her shirt and the faded pale scar that sat there on her chest. It was astonishing to see how fast she healed, as the scar almost looked weeks—if not *months*—older than the scar should be.

"Today was just not our day, huh?" She said as she stared at him. A little smile crept on her lips after a moment, and he felt his shoulders loosen. "Someday though, *will* be."

His lips twitched; he was tempted to smile.

"Are you okay?" he asked while keeping his eyes on her scar.

Her smile widened, but the dark rings under her eyes and the twitch at the corner of her lips spoke of her true exhaustion.

Otherwise, she looked acceptably *alive*.

"I'm fine...I've taken a lot of damage before while using that seal, but surprisingly I've never had to regrow part of my own heart before...It was actually *very* enlightening!—but let's not do it a second time. Deal?"

He felt his lips tug into a smile beneath his mask, despite his weariness. "*Deal*."

The Copy-Nin watched her eyes travel over the room as she sat on her knees on top of her futon.

Her eyes paused at the futon laid out next to hers. Kakashi had told their host they would stay together, as it was customary during ANBU missions to never split up, but it seemed she took as they were a couple. If it bothered Sakura somehow, she didn't say.

Instead, she patted the futon next to hers and motioned for him to lie down on top of it.

"Let me fix you up, then you can catch me up on what I missed...—*Ah*,

*actually you may want to grab a towel first?* These futons look way too expensive for you to be bleeding all over it..."

He stepped into the adjacent bathroom and grabbed a big fluffy-looking white towel that was placed by the sink for them to use and spread it out over the futon before laying down over it. Slowly, he peeled back the blood-soaked compression shirt to let Sakura examine his wound.

It was a mess—dirt and grim were mixed in with the dried blood. Fresh blood too.

Her feather-light fingers traced over the line of her stitches and a green chakra started to flood into his system. He watched her pink brows flurry together as she bit her bottom lip in concentration.

"Let's see...somewhat minor chakra exhaustion. *Major* physical exhaustion. Some bruising and cuts...as for the large gash—it's really not that bad? The wound grazed right above the hip with a clean entry and exit, and was shallow enough that it didn't hit any major organs. It looks like the stitches popped while in transit and caused gradual bleeding, but overall it's just a flesh wound...It won't take long at all."

"How long are we talking—?" He felt her chakra flood into his systems.

It washed over him in a soothing burst that felt like menthol—tingling and cool—and took away any discomfort immediately. He felt momentarily dazed at the relief of it, so he bit his tongue and shut his eyes at the sensation. As quickly as it started, it disappeared only moments later.

*"There!* All done."

With nimble fingers, Sakura pulled the loose stitching out with a tug. She rubbed her thumb over the new skin, before wiping the wound with the towel beneath him. Kakashi quickly sat up, Sharingan swirling as he observed where the injury once was. There was no scar or any trace of it previously being hurt.

"How did you do that?" He gruffed out as his fingers traced an invisible scar on his torso.

"Do what? Heal you?" She looked at him confused.

"How could you do it that fast? I've never seen a medic do that before."

She snorted. "It's because I know your chakra so well. You're right for anyone else it would have taken me a little longer. But each person has their own chakra flow—their own frequency. And I know yours better than anyone, that's why I can match it instantly and apply medical jutsu without a second thought."

He stared at her blankly. "I wonder how many times I had to injure myself for you to get that point...?"

The Copy-nin felt exasperated just thinking about it. He shut his left eye again, in an attempt to slow the chakra drain from it, as she continued her examination of his other minor injuries.

"Oh, *countless*...if we are keeping a tally, I'm pretty sure I've saved your life more than you've saved mine." Her green eyes shined competitively.

"So, what you're telling me is that you are the *absolute, single* reason as to why I make it to the ripe old age of my forties?"

She smiled coyly, "Of course, I am."

Kakashi hummed appreciatively and watched her make quick work of several cuts and bruises along his arms.

Every once in a while, her soft fingers would linger over past scars. Some of them were pale and faded, others jagged and raised. Thousands of little marks littered his chest and arms, and he wondered how much worse it was in the future.

"...I had forgotten how many scars you had." He watched her trace a particularly deep nick on his forearm, as he studied the cool reflective green of her eyes.

"Forgotten? Have they disappeared somewhere?"

Her gentle fingers twitched as if she realized she was lingering, and she cleared her throat and moved on.

"Sort of. I wasn't joking you know, I'm basically your personal medic." She laughed under her breath, but the viridian pools of her eyes stayed on their task of healing a bruise near his rib.

"You refuse to go to the hospital like a normal person. So, I literally had to beg you to come to me instead. I do all your check-ups and post-mission healing sessions...but it's mostly *years* of you sneaking in through my window at all times of day or night already half-dead."

He raised a brow at her statement but didn't reply. He wasn't surprised to hear his adamant dislike of health institutions continued on in the future.

He was, however, surprised by his heavy reliance on *her*.

He sat up when she was done healing but remained silent. When he did not comment on her declaration, she gave another knowing coy smile with dancing eyes.

"Unsettling, isn't it? To have someone you don't know that well, know every inch of your body?" her fingers flitted across his shoulder mockingly.

He gave her a lazy unimpressed look. "You're exaggerating."

"Am not," she almost sang.

"Alright, then," he scoffed, "Prove it to me."

She blinked up at him.

"...are you sure?"

"Why not?" Kakashi shrugged to cover his irritation, "Tell me about my bum knee, and a stiff shoulder."

*There is no fucking way...*

Sakura snorted. "No, no that's *far* too boring."

Her smile grew even wider, but Kakashi stilled when he felt her fingers linger on a certain spot.

"*Here*, where your shoulder meets your neck—you have a small, almost invisible scar from where you barely dodged Kushina. When she threw a kitchen knife at you for saying something incredibly rude. You didn't tell me what it was, but you laughed and said it was '*justifiable, even with that temper of hers*'."

Her cool fingers traveled upwards toward the indent on his hairline.

"Up here, you said you banged your head on a door when you were a toddler. You don't remember it, but you said your father would rub it sometimes and say your mother would kill him if she could see it."

She smiled wryly and dropped her hand to his knee that was resting between them.

"Right above your left knee you have a small star-shaped scar that Obito left from a stray shuriken during practice. You told me once that *'his aim was as bad as his personality'...*"

He felt her fingers shift towards his right hand and ghost over the back of his fingerless gloves.

"And *here*, you have a scar from a kunai that went straight through your palm—just like Naruto's from that day when we were heading to the Land of Waves. *Except*, you didn't do it to yourself—Rin did it to you, when she attacked you right before she died—and you *refused* to fight back."

Her clear jade eyes finally met his. They searched his own in a moment of silence, and Kakashi was unsure of what she was trying to find.

He felt his mouth go dry, and that nagging persistent storm of multiple emotions brewed in his chest. He didn't notice until later that her hand didn't move from his.

"Why would you know all this about me? *Why would you even care?*"

She shrugged, "We made a deal."

"*What deal?*" He growled through gritted teeth. His left eye pulsed, and he struggled to keep it closed.

"I asked if I could heal your scars—all of them. You had so many from your ANBU days that you never tended too properly, but you wouldn't let me touch these select few—so we made a deal. I agreed to let you keep those scars, if you told me why."

"...And I just *told* you?"

"No, you gave me some pretty bullshitty answers at first," she said with a snort. "But you see I can be *very* persistent—and stubborn—truly, it's equal parts both my talent and my downfall. In this case, however, I was able to wear you down little by little until the answers

started to sound suspiciously like truths."

She tilted her head to the side with a smile. Kakashi contemplated her reply.

"...You know every inch?"

"Medically? *Yes*, I do."

"...including my face?"

A cocky smirk painted itself on her face. "I was wondering when you'd ask."

"I thought you were bluffing when you told Naruto the other day. You laid it on a little thick, don't you think?"

"Naruto didn't believe me either!!" she laughed, and then dropped her voice to playful purr. "And I didn't lay it on thick—*have you seen your face?* Your beauty mark? It's just not fair you look like that and hide it behind a mask."

He rubbed the back of his neck uncomfortably. If they were as close as she claimed they were, he supposed it made sense that she would have seen his face.

"...It's okay though. Don't force yourself around me just because I've seen you without your mask. The one who showed me was Future-Kakashi, not you. He was comfortable enough to show me—I don't expect the same from you."

She gave a polite, but dimmed smile.

Kakashi just nodded in response.

"Speaking of masks, what happened to our ANBU masks? Why did you take both of ours off?"

Kakashi shrugged. "Hikari's mother said she wanted to see the faces of the ones who saved her daughter. Who was I to refuse a Daimyo's wife?"

The pinkette pointed at his usual mask with mirth in her eyes. "Ah, bet she wasn't expecting a second one underneath. Was she okay with that one?"

"...no, not really." he recalled with a breathy chuckle. "She ordered me

to take it off too, but before I could refuse her and cause a diplomatic nightmare, the little girl came to my rescue."

"Your biggest secret—*saved by a five year old!* " She smiled wider, but it faltered a bit after a moment of thought. "Is Hikari-chan okay...? She was so scared, and I'm sure she saw far too much for any child, much less one so young."

Kakashi thought for a moment, he wanted to choose his words carefully. He patted her head like he had done before and tried to ignore the specks of blood that settled in her pink locks.

"She's alive and safe now. *She's home.* Pakkun told me how you handled the situation, you did everything right." Kakashi felt his voice quiet to a contrite whisper. "I'm the one that needs to apologize. If I had properly disposed of my opponent, then you wouldn't have had to take a hit for me....I'm sorry for that. And thank you for saving my life once again."

Her green eyes softened at his tone as she looked up at him under his hand.

"Well, I can't let you *die* before we even get started, Kakashi. Talk about a temporal catastrophe."

Kakashi snorted but felt another smile tug at his lips beneath his mask.

~~~~~ かかし ~~~~~

After Sakura had decreed that they were both chakra depleted and physically exhausted, she sent them both to clean up and to get to bed right away.

Kakashi felt somewhat like a small child that was being herded from one place to the next.

She practically pushed him in the bathroom to shower. Then, took his dirtied and bloodied uniform from him to get cleaned and mended. He knew she had packed some of his extra ANBU undershirts and pants

just in case, and he heard her pop the storage scroll to retrieve them.

As soon as he was out, she all but shoved him into his futon and turned off the lights as she moved to the bathroom for her turn.

There he laid, after the fact, like a child during their bedtime thinking there was no way he would be able to sleep.

...But the sound of the shower echoed in the room and her soft humming resonated on the wall tiles of the bathroom. The smell of soap and Sakura's own scent wafted in the air, and Kakashi faded into sleep without his permission.

He awoke in the middle of the night—panting and sweating like usual when he had a nightmare.

He sat straight up trying to calm himself and take note of his surroundings. The sky was darker outside and long pale shadows cast along the room.

The shower was no longer running, and there was no humming.

Just silence.

And of course...His own crushing—*Anxiety. Panic. Fear. Guilt. Remorse.*

The usual.

He searched for her frantically as his chest heaved in the shock of his nightmare. Large broken breaths were pushing his way out his chest and he struggled to get them under control.

And then...

There she was, laying in her futon a few feet away from him, huddled under the ridiculously fluffy futon with nothing to be seen but a wave of damp bubblegum hair splayed out on her pillow.

She was close. So close, he could reach out and touch her if he really wanted too.

He couldn't see her face at first, but she mumbled something and shifted her face out from under her cocoon. Glowing feline—like eyes caught the moonlight as they blinked up at him sleepy. Her brows flurried and she stifled a yawn as she stared at him with blurry eyes.

"Mm-mmm...—*kashi?* " She mumbled quietly, but Kakashi was having trouble hearing her over the sound of his heavy heartbeat and gasps of air.

"Mmmm breathe...just breathe Kakashi..." her eyes slid shut again sleepily.

A lone arm stretched out towards him from her blanket cocoon. It rested on the tatami mat in the space between their two futons, like it was suspended in some kind of no man's land—searching for something.

"*Breathe*...just breathe," she grumbled as she continued to repeat herself again.

She told him to breathe over and over with the same quiet voice. At first, the words were seconds apart...then minutes...

...until Kakashi had at some point laid back down and fell asleep again staring at the small hand reaching towards him, and the soft voice that wouldn't let him be alone.

~~~~~ さくら ~~~~~

Sakura woke up the next morning with her mind clear, but her body was still aching and sluggish.

She was tired. Just so so tired...and there was definitely a phantom ache in her sternum that she was determined to ignore.

So, she slept. *She deserved it, right?*

She dazed in and out of sleep even as the sun rose higher and higher in the sky. Kakashi did much of the same next to her.

It must have been nearing noon by the time she was forced awake by a knock on the door.

"Honored guests?" a voice called from the hallway. "Daimyo-sama requests your presence today. We would like to serve lunch for you both if you would allow us to set up...?"

She peeked out from her cave of blankets to find Kakashi sitting up in his bed, raking a hand through his messy silver hair and yawning underneath his mask. He stood and stretched his back, making Sakura note she would have to massage him again since she assumed he carried her all the way here.

He slid the door open and stuck his head out to discuss something with the room attendant. While Sakura pushed her way out her mass of blankets like some kind of birthed animal, and went about tidying away their futons. Kakashi slid the door shut when he was done and moved behind her to help stack the futons in the corner of the room.

He was wearing only his black sleeveless ANBU undershirt and a pair of cotton joggers, but he was all lithe muscles and pale scars. Sakura took in the sight sneakily.

Her own body was wrapped in one of his masked undershirts, but the mask laid around her neck in a pool of fabric. It fit like an oversized sleep dress, settling mid-thigh, and was comfortable enough to where she had no complaints. Who needed pants anyway?

"Go ahead and get ready." He called to her aimlessly, but Sakura caught his gaze before he shifted away. Was he eyeing her legs?

He cleared his throat.

"Our uniforms are still being mended, but apparently there seems to be a Tanabata festival tonight, so the matriarch is planning to dress us in summer yukata for the day. An attendant should be here soon to help us dress,"

"Are we staying here that long? I thought you would want to leave right away..."

"Ah, believe me—I *tried*." His eyes strained in an exhausted droop, as he pushed a hand through his hair again. "But we are being formally invited to the festival by the Daimyo himself. It looks like there is no getting out of this tonight."

He sat cross-legged on the floor and placed his cheek in the palm of his hand in a bored sulk. She'd seen that pout of his many times as Rokudaime. Sakura smiled at his child-like behavior as she crossed the room and patted his shoulder affectionately.

"Kakashi..." she warned cheekily, while catching his mismatched eyes with her own. "I'm afraid you're going to need to get used to

diplomacy. *It's inevitable.* "

He questioned her with a raised brow, but she brushed him off with a grin and went straight towards the bathroom to get ready for the day.

She went through her morning routine, and stared at the extra pair of blue jonin fatigues he gave to her to change into. It was all about five sizes too large, but she would have to make do.

Sakura put aside the blue shirt and hoisted the pants in place. She rolled up the bottom several times until her feet were free of fabric. Then, tucked the masked ANBU undershirt she was wearing into the pants and belted them high onto her waist to secure them.

As she came out, the room attendants had laid out a small table. It was covered with multiple dishes that were all high-end and exuberant in nature—sashimi, nabe, tataki. Which was kind of them, but she was mostly pleased by the small woven plate of tempura instead.

Sakura hummed happily and sat at the table, as Kakashi left to take his turn to get ready.

When he returned, they ate together with quiet conversation and lulled silences in between. She could tell he was still worn out despite his never changing facade of nonchalance and ever present half-lidded eyes.

By the time they were done, a small army of attendants swarmed the room to remove the dishes and the table. Sakura fidgeted at all the movement, and was only able to relax when the last attendant fled the room. She was about to speak when the door slid open in a rush, surprising her.

*"Hound-kun! Fox-chan! I hope you are feeling better today?"* Sakura heard a girlish voice exclaim.

Hikari burst through the wood sliding door without a knock or concern at all. She grinned with a huge bright smile, and Sakura was instantly pleased to see the young girl.

As far as she could see she didn't see any signs of distress or tears from yesterday, and silently prayed that she would be okay after such an ordeal. With a huge jump, she tackled Sakura's legs and looked up with sparkling brown eyes.

"Hikari-chan! I'm so glad you're home safe." Sakura smiled and patted the girl's head. "Great job getting Hound-kun back for me! You did *wonderful*."

"You should have seen it, Fox-chan! I was riding on this big ol' doggy like a horse! Hound-kun let me ride him all the way back home!"

"*Hai, hai~!* Didn't I tell you? Hound-kun's doggies are the best!" Sakura stated with pride. Hikari jumped up and down in agreement with a tiny squeal.

"Hound-kun! Can I see the doggies again? Please, *please...!* "

Sakura followed the girl's begging eyes to their target. Kakashi was just staring at them both with utter amusement shining in his single grey eye, as he kept his Sharingan closed for the Hikari's sake. He was still sitting on the floor, with one leg propped up and a masked cheek resting on his fist.

Kakashi lifted his eye to Sakura in a questioning glance, but otherwise ignored the young girl still pleading and tugging at the fabric of his jonin pants as she crawled towards him to beg.

"...I suppose it wouldn't hurt for me to take a look at Pakkun. Plus, some of the others may be injured too. Why don't you go ahead?"

His eyes crinkled in response, "Just don't spoil them *too* much...can't have them raising their expectations anytime soon."

Sakura grinned.

In a blur of movement so fast that neither of the girls could see, Kakashi summoned his pack in a cloud of smoke that encompassed the entire room.

Eight happy ninken appeared in front of them with eight happy thuds of tails pounding the tatami mats as they sat in excitement.

Hikari squealed in delight as she threw herself among the dogs as they crowded around her sniffing and licking her ticklishly. However, one proud little pug stayed behind to address his master.

"Yo, Boss. Pink-Lady. Looking much better today," Pakkun panted. Sakura knelt down scratch behind his ears.

"Pakkun," the Copy-nin greeted. "Sakura wanted to take a look at the

pack to address any injuries."

A charcoal eye shifted to meet hers. Sakura ran her hand over the dog's hindlegs and ribs, checking her previous healing session.

"How are your ribs and legs, Pakkun? Any discomfort?" she asked.

"I'm right as rain, Lady. You did a good job fixing me up," the pug panting and gave a little lick to her hand. "The rest of the pack had some minor injuries but nothing they aren't used to...But I'm sure a few steaks would make all the difference?"

His large eyes gave a cute puppy-dog-stare towards Kakashi.

The silver-haired nin kept his chin resting on his hand but raised a brow at the little begging dog with a blank stare. Before he could answer, Hikari's girlish voice chimed in.

"*Of course, Pakkun~!* You all deserve the best! I'll make sure there are enough steaks for all the doggies!" Hikari promised eagerly as sat up among her swarm of ninkin. "Tonight is a special night after all! Please—Hound-kun, Fox-chan! You must enjoy the festival tonight! It's my absolute favorite."

Sakura laughed as she pulled the small girl to her feet, releasing her from the furry prison of dogs. "Your favorite?"

"Mmhm! Mother says Tanabata is the most romantic story ever! Two lovers that can only cross the milky way to meet each other once a year," she sighed dreamily. "But I like the bamboo tree with all the pretty decorations in them! *And the food—!* "

Sakura's eyes caught Kakashi's lone eye as he watched the young girl with a gentle amusement. She couldn't see it, but she knew he was smiling under his mask.

Sakura had seen that look many times in the last few years. He always did have a soft spot for innocence.

"Yakisoba! Takoyaki! Ikeyaki! *Anything with 'yaki'~!* But don't worry, Pakkun! I'll make sure we get some meat for you too!"

All eight dogs wagged their tails at the small girl's feet. Sakura giggled at the sight, as she moved to pat Hikari's head again, but was interrupted by a knock at the door.

It slid open a second later, and the rich woman from before stepped into the room.

The entire room froze.

Eight ninken, immediately straightened up and aligned themselves as a pack of soldiers, all looking serious and stoic, as if no petting or belly rubbing had occurred only moments before.

Sakura also felt her stomach drop, it couldn't be the best manners to bring *eight* dogs into someone's home without permission.

Just as Sakura guessed, the woman was not pleased.

She wrinkled her nose at the sight of the room in clear distaste. Silent fury bristled on the woman's face and she squeezed the fan she held in her hand into a tight fist.

Behind her stepped in a middle-aged man with long brown hair and equally expensive white robes. Kakashi rose immediately at the sight of the man and knelt before him in a deep bow. Sakura followed his lead without question, as she too dropped to kneeling.

"Hikari dear, what in the world are all these dogs doing in here?" the Lady of the House asked with a high-pitched tense voice, and a wave of an ornate fan in front of her face.

"Mother! Father! These doggies helped save me with Hound-kun and Fox-chan! I promised them some steak since they were such good puppies!" Sakura watched Hikari run to her parents while explaining the canine situation. Thank the gods for the little girl.

"*I see*," she snapped the fan shut and held it against her chin in contemplation. Keen eyes shifted from the line of dogs, to her daughter's face. She let out a frustrated sigh. "Well, I suppose every debt must be paid."

"Hikari-chan, we will make sure they are all fed justly for their service," the Daimyo spoke as he placed a pale hand on his daughter's shoulder. His voice was soft yet demanding, it felt befitting for the country's leader.

The eight ninken yipped happily at the proclamation but quieted down as Kakashi cast them a glance. Sakura smiled at the girl's glee at her father's acknowledgement.

The Daimyo turned to the two ANBU kneeling in front of him and she stiffened at the sudden attention. She assumed the Daimyo wouldn't address them so informally, and she was hoping to be wearing her Fox mask as a buffer.

"Hatake Kakashi, I've been told. Your renown is well known even among civilians. The Hatake clan has always been valuable allies to my family for generations." His eyes shifted to Sakura. "And someone I do not know...?"

Sakura was sweating at the recognition. She wasn't sure if she should lie or speak honestly—after all he was the leader of their country. Before she could open her mouth, Kakashi covered for her.

"Haruno Chiharu, Daimyo-sama. A new ANBU operative." Sakura felt her muscles relax at his low voice.

*Okay, half-truth/half-lie then. She could work with that.*

"I see. I'm afraid I don't know the Haruno Clan...?"

"We are a family of civilian merchants, Daimyo-sama. I'm afraid I am the only shinobi currently in the family," she answered truthfully.

"A civilian ANBU? How remarkable. It's very rare these days..." He smiled but Sakura could tell he felt unimpressed with her. "How thankful I am that the esteemed Hatake Clan was there to oversee the situation."

*How predictable.* Sakura felt her jaw tighten. *Of course, he would give Kakashi all the credit.*

"Regardless, you both did me a great service. Because of you, my youngest daughter was brought home safely. I am certainly grateful for the shinobi of our great country."

He bowed slightly at the waist, and his wife and daughter automatically bowed with him, but a little deeper than his own. Sakura and Kakashi responded just as deeply.

The Daimyo straightened and backed slowly to the door to make his exit without another word. His tabi clothed feet softly stepped into the hallway and disappeared further down out of range.

His wife however, stayed for a moment longer.



"Please enjoy the night here. The Fire Capital is known for our festivals, and this one in particular is a delight. Everything tonight will be on us. And one must look the part of our guest, so we will dress you for the night as well..." she hid a small sneer of her lips with her fan.

"Tomorrow, payment will be sent post-haste to your Hokage. Please give him our regards for a job well done."

The portly woman patted Hikari's head, and with one last scouring look at the dogs, she moved to exit the room after her husband.

"Have fun, Hound-kun! Fox-chan! Don't forget to see the fireworks!" Hikari smiled brightly and gave one last little wave. Sakura waved back with an equal grin and watched as Hikari followed her family out.

The room visibly relaxed. All eight dogs dropped their statue like stances, panting resumed, and tails started wagging again. Sakura couldn't help but feel the same way.

Kakashi let out a deep sigh as he sat back relaxed on the tatami mat. His one leg hiked up as he laid his arm across it lazily and his half-lidded eyes looked slightly more droopy than normal.

Sakura chuckled lightly under her breath at the sight of the exhausted ANBU. Fighting was easy for the man, but customary socializing seemed like torture.

"I bet you're really regretting not taking *Icha Icha* with you right now."

The Copy-nin chuckled and ran a pale hand through his silver hair with desperation.

"Maa, Sakura-chan has anyone ever told you—you're kind of a brat sometimes? I feel like you're enjoying my misery a little too much."

"Don't worry," she flashed him a toothy smile as she breathed out. "You'll grow to love it."

He didn't answer her with some snippy remark like she thought he would, but instead just watched her with level eyes. The red one in particular was spinning dizzily in a way that made Sakura feel mesmerized, although she was sure she wasn't under any genjutsu.

She licked her lips and felt her chakra flare under his gaze. She

matched his stare—mismatched to green. And watched the lazy spin of the tomoe and wondered just what was going through his head.

"Honor guests?" A voice called from the hall. "We are here to help you dress for the festivities if you are ready. The gentleman can follow me to another room, and we will dress the lady here."

*Why is this place always so busy?*

Kakashi blinked and tore away his stare from her as if he was startled by the interruption. He stood up abruptly and slid the door open while never looking back at her and disappeared into the hallway.

Sakura turned to the ninken still sitting in the room by her side. All eight pairs of eyes were eyeing her steadily.

"What was *that*?" Pakkun asked her as a small army of attendants let themselves into the room.

"Not sure," Sakura hummed. "But don't worry, he'll get over it soon enough."

"How can you be sure?" Shiba panted. Sakura smiled softly.

"Because...he always does."

She wasn't sure the eight dogs entirely understood her, but they wagged their tails nonetheless and panted happily at the response. Seconds later, they collectively poofed out existence leaving nothing but smoke and startled civilians in their wake.

Sakura shifted her attention to the scurrying attendants in the room.

It wasn't long before the attendants brought in racks with several light-weight cotton yukata in many different colors and patterns. Sakura thumbed through them excitedly—there was a large array of pinks, reds, and purples that in her younger years she would have gravitated towards.

*Ah, but she wasn't that same person anymore—*

Instead, she chose a dark teal yukata that was a deep jewel-tone and reminded her of when the ocean couldn't decide if it wanted to be green or blue.

It was decadent and rich in color, and depicted small white flowers that were scattered across the hem and sleeves. Despite the depth of

color, the fabric was light and breathable for the hot summer nights. Her fingers traced the flowers on it in appreciation.

"You have good taste, Miss!" the attendant said. "It's one of my favorites, but not many people can wear such a color. But I have a feeling with your unusual hair, it will be truly stunning on you... If you would allow me! I recommend this obi, Miss."

The attendant held up an iridescent obi that was a faded dark gold. It looked solid from far away, but on closer inspection Sakura could see it was thousands of diamond shapes chain-linked in a pattern of embroidered silver and gold.

Sakura smiled at the attendant—she was *absolutely* pleased.

~~~~~ かかし ~~~~~

“—*You'll grow to love it.*”

Kakashi followed his own attendant down the hall and away from the pink kunoichi with a relieved heave of his lungs. He was happy to get some distance from her, even if it was only momentarily.

He was starting to worry about his own sanity at this point.

He could feel it. Like the nagging blur of pink that was always in sight

—

She was forcing her existence on him.

...and Kakashi wanted her to.

He *liked* her. Four days together—and he—*fuck*.

He knew he would likely grow attached to his little students someday.

He knew Naruto was inevitable with his father's coloring and his mother's personality.

Sasuke was the last attachment to Obito and Itachi. The young boy

was like him at that age, alone and in need of guidance. He owed the Uchiha this.

These he *expected*; he knew he would grow to care for them.

But Sakura—

Little civilian Sakura.

She was *not* in the plan.

And every second he spent with her, every moment she hinted at their bond—teacher to student, teammate, medic whatever it was—*it felt like it was eating Kakashi alive.*

Like she was clawing and ripping her way into his chest, and proving to him that as much he could disregard it, fight it, or run from it—it was inescapable.

She was inescapable.

And it scared Kakashi. That someone so normal (yet admittedly: *also fucking extraordinary*), could weasel her way into his life and his older self just *accepted* it. It scared the living hell out of him.

He vowed a long time ago—*everyone* in the village was important, but *no one* would be important to him personally.

He'd fight for them. He'd protect them. He'd die for them.

But...

He was also determined to keep everyone he ever cared about at a distance—to detach, and to disengage at any attachments. He couldn't handle those types of bonds anymore.

And his Future-self just seemed to throw all of that out the window.

Who else did he trust to this extent? Who else did he let within arm's reach? Did Naruto and Sasuke know him this well?

Did he have three little monster-like students running around with his heart/secrets in the future?

(What the hell happened in fifteen years for him to change *that* much?)

"Hatake-sama...? Your dressing room is right this way?" his attendant asked with mild concern, oblivious to Kakashi's internal crisis.

The Copy-nin blinked at the man and ducked into the waiting room with the intent to shut all further thoughts of the pink-haired woman out for the time being.

Inside, the room was a carbon copy of the room they were staying in. The room's traditional interior was transformed into a full-blown dressing room with several racks of clothing, shelves of geta, and full-length mirrors donning each side of the room.

Two female attendants stood at the ready, and Kakashi couldn't help but notice their sheepish smiles and blushed cheeks.

"*Hatake-sama!* Is there a style or color you would like to wear to the festival?" one of the women asked shyly.

Kakashi wanted to laugh—he could care less about the entire event, much less what he was wearing.

He wanted to be *away* from diplomacy and niceties.

He wanted *away* from the single room with the pink-haired woman.

(He wanted Icha Icha and a nice nap in a tree somewhere.)

"Hatake-sama?" the other meek woman asked while peeking up at him through her lashes in what he assumed was an alluring look.

The Copy-nin felt a shiver of revolt at her leer. He crinkled his eyes in a polite smile, but he could feel that his lips didn't move at all for the gesture.

"Why don't you go ahead and choose something for me. I'm afraid this is not quite my forte," He smoothed the words out politely.

The two women squealed in delight at his words. "Of course, Hatake-sama! Please leave it to us!"

They began chatting among themselves and fingering through racks of men's yukata and obi. Kakashi watched them in polite disinterest as they spoke to him every so often, but he struggled to not seem too bored and blatantly finding the process taxing.

When they finally settled on their pick, they turned to him with a little too much eagerness in their eyes.

Dread filled his stomach.

"Now, let's get you undressed. Shall we?" one giggled and they both stepped towards him.

They wanted to undress him. And by the matching leers and feral smiles—he could only imagine how handsy they'd be.

Kakashi watched as two pairs of feminine hands slowly stretched out towards him.

As they closed in, he felt his slumped posture straighten to his full height. He cocked his head as his carefully closed eye opened in warning. The Sharingan blazed.

They both froze and paled considerably. One of the woman's hands was still outstretched and was now trembling. The other had sweat forming on her brow.

"Ah, I think...I can take care of this part by myself ladies," he stated in a low voice with each word painfully slow and articulate.

He would only give one warning.

"O-of course, *Hatake-sama!* We will step outside. Please call us in if you need assistance!"

They backed away in unison—heads down, eyes on the floor—until their backs hit the door before they turned and darted out the room in a scurry.

He blinked at their exit and sighed, his slump returning again.

Maybe he overdid it a bit?

Despite the women's forwardness, when he found what they had laid out for him, he was pleased overall.

It was a grey yukata that transitioned from light to dark in an ombre effect. On his shoulders were lightest grey, closest to his own silver hair and it contrasted with the black of his masked undershirt as it hung slightly open on his covered chest. It grew gradually darker in different shades of grey until it was almost black by the hem and bottom of the sleeves.

It was simple. No fancy designs or patterns. No sticking out too much in a crowd.

Just what he wanted.

He tied it around his body and secured it with the matching steel grey obi they had left for him. Just for good measure, he slid a few kunai into the sleeve and an emergency storage scroll he tucked away in the back of the obi.

And of course, the nice little stamped seal that proved all bills would be sent to the Daimyo.

(How useful was *that*?)

When he went to slide open the door, he found both women standing off to the side of the wall waiting for him patiently. Their hesitant eyes shifted to ones of blatant infatuation again, so he figured they didn't take his warning too personally.

"You look *wonderful*, Hatake-sama!" they gushed as he nodded in thanks and tried to thank them appropriately. "Your partner also looked truly stunning! She just passed through to the main gate of the compound. We were told to bring you to her whenever you were ready."

Kakashi nodded and followed the women through the winding halls into the main courtyard of the Daimyo's estate. He slipped on a pair of geta they had brought for him and stepped out the genkan door to face the estate's red imposing gates.

There, standing underneath them—was Sakura.

—Little civilian Sakura.

Looking stupidly gorgeous. Like he supposed she ought to be: The Neosannin. Matriarch of the Uchiha clan.

"*Kakashi!* " She smiled when she saw him, with no urging and no real reason.

Pink lips spread in a radiant grin that was wide and genuine, and somehow made his muscles tense and his stomach drop. He could feel his Sharingan spin eagerly to capture the moment.

She was wearing some kind of—*teal? turquoise?*—whatever the green-blue color of her yukata was, it brightened the pink of her hair and made her eyes glow a whole new shade that Kakashi had never seen before.

Her bubblegum locks were swept up into an elegant bun that was poised on the top of her head. A gold hair pin that looked like a hanging wisteria blossom was tucked underneath the base of the bun and hung in a chain to the base of her exposed neck.

Her face was flushed from the summer heat, spreading across her cheeks, and when a delicate hand reached up and tucked one of the long bangs neatly behind her ear, he could see it spread to the tips of her ear too.

Up until now he had only really seen her in combat wear.

But there was something about seeing her like this. While the black uniform was all business, this felt more personal. He liked it—it was unforgiving. Relentless in her boldness. Proud to show off just who she was—strong and beautiful.

While Kakashi was subdued in his greys and blacks, Sakura was a beacon of pink, green, and whatever this blue-green color was that shined brazenly and unapologetically.

She was going to outshine the world with emerald green eyes and ridiculous bubblegum hair.

"Thank the gods you're not late this time." She continued to smile up at him eagerly. *"Let's go!"*

She grabbed the tip of sleeve just like she had before, and dragged him out the gates with little regard to his being. And Kakashi just went along, like he assumed he always would—or will.

"My my, no need to rush. The festival isn't going anywhere," he felt his eyes crease at her childish excitement.

"But Kakashi! It's so rare we get a night off like this...Let's enjoy it! Let's drink and eat to our heart's content—just you and me!" She grinned back at him but kept dragging him down the street, the clack of geta never pausing.

"Mmmm Sakura-chan that sounds suspiciously like a date, you know. Are you sure Sasuke-kun will be okay with that?" Her viridian eyes slanted to his.

"A date? ...if that's what you want to call it—" she grinned. *"I wouldn't be opposed,"* she purred in a low sultry voice.

Kakashi's eyes widened at the tease. His step faltered.

Her smile widened a little further. "Besides...Sasuke never spoils me on dates like you do."

Ah, she was clearly joking.

"Then...I guess I'll have to go all out to impress tonight. Buy whatever you want."

"How gentlemanly of you, considering the Daimyo is covering all the costs?" She quirked a brow in amusement.

"Well, a man should never turn down a golden opportunity."

"How cheap." She laughed. "But somehow, still charming."

Right outside the gates, along a riverbank and nestled within the trees, sat a large temple that Kakashi noticed when he entered the city yesterday. A prime spot for a festival.

The riverbank stretched for miles; most of it lined with different booths, some offered food or games, while others had places to write your wishes to tie to the Tanabata decorated bamboo trees. Traditional paper wind ornaments and lanterns were hung along the walkway—colorful and vibrant. The rustle of the windswept ornament's guided festival goer's further into the event. The whole area smelled of fried food and sounded like people's laughter.

"What do we go for first?" Sakura asked while pursuing several booths with a very serious face that made her seem even more child-like.

"Choco bananas? Shaved ice? Dango?"

"You want to start with dessert first?"

She shot him a blank stare. "Of course, we need dessert first. It stimulates the appetite."

"Is that what you, as a medic, tell your toddler? Isn't it usually '*eat your vegetables then dessert*'?"

Sakura snorted, "This is a festival, Kakashi. Have some fun. We're both responsible adults, we can do what we want. Besides, who *wouldn't* want dessert first?"

He shrugged. "Never been one for sweets."

"Pfft! Well, that's certainly not true. You just need the right ones!" She patted a bench that was nestled under a tree near them. "Sit right here and I'll be right back."

Before he could protest, she had already spun around and was gone within the crowd. The sun was setting now, and everything was painted in shades of orange and red, but Kakashi's eyes were following pink and teal.

He watched the head of bubblegum hair jostle and maneuver her way through the people with ease. She seemed unaware of the wake of men that were turning their gaze to follow after her, oblivious to her attractiveness.

Kakashi did not envy Future-Sasuke for having to beat off hordes of men that coveted his wife.

The Copy-nin sighed and sat on the bench. He stretched out his arms along the back of it, and tilted his head back so his face was aimed towards the sky. With a tired huff, he closed his eyes and waited patiently for her to return.

It didn't take long.

"*Kakashiii*~! I have your favorite!"

He opened his eyes to see a plastic tray with three small pillows of white on them.

"...Daifuku?"

"Fresh. *Strawberry*. Daifuku."

Kakashi took the tray slowly. He placed it on his lap and sliced one open with a wooden pick it was served with. Inside the powdery white pillow of mochi was a fresh strawberry surrounded by a thin layer of red bean paste.

The floral scent of an-paste and the sweet, tangy smell of strawberries.

He didn't take a bite, instead his eyes shifted to the woman sitting beside him, stuffing her face with a stick tri-colored dango.

"Why would you think this is my favorite?"

She stopped chewing, and turned her attention to him with a puffed-out cheek that was stuffed with dango.

"...because it is?" She cocked her head at the seemingly odd question. "You showed me how to make it, and we've eaten it several times with the kids. It's the only thing that's not too sweet for you. Well—that and goma dango, but they didn't have any today."

He gave her a pointed look. Her green eyes bore in his suddenly serious, as she chewed the end of the dango stick hesitantly.

"But...but I *know* it's your favorite, because you told me one time that it reminds you of your mother—or at least the smell of it does. Her scent is one of the only things you can connect to her."

"Of course." Kakashi felt his face twist into a defeated grimace even as he tried to smile through it. "*Of course, I told you that.*"

He felt a small hand rest against his wrist that held the tray of sweets. Her fingers rubbed small circles over his pulse point on the inside of his wrist.

"Hey...I-I'm sorry I keep doing that. I know it's frustrating for you. To have an openness that you're not used to with someone you don't know that well. I get it."

Kakashi didn't answer right away. It really wasn't her fault; she was just being honest in her knowledge. But it still felt like all his inner secrets, all his hidden memories, were being ripped out and put on display.

"I know you hate it, but I promise it's a *good thing!* You learn to trust again. You learn to talk about yourself and the things you went through. It's really good for you, ya know?" She smiled sympathetically at him.

"...Is it just you I'm divulging all my inner demons to, or is the entire village walking around with firsthand Hatake knowledge?"

She chuckled and twisted the dango stick in her fingers nervously. While her eyes were focused on the task, Kakashi ate his daifuku quickly. They tasted sweeter than usual to him, but he didn't mind this time.

"It's just me mostly. Naruto is too busy getting ready for his Hokage-dom and Sasuke—is well—*Sasuke*. He has the emotional range of a teaspoon." She laughed, "So, that leaves you and me. Always us together."

Kakashi lifted his mask into place after he was done eating, and silently grabbed the dango stick from between her fingers. He placed it on his empty daifuku container to bring to the trash. Her eyes travelled up to his with a small smile in thanks.

"I know I'm making it sound like you changed a lot, but you're still ya know, *you*. You still read Icha Icha—"

For some reason that made him laugh.

"—*Oh, perfect*. The future isn't *doomed* then."

"—and Gai is still your best friend."

"—*Really?* I was *sure* that he'd be bored of me by then."

She swatted at his shoulder playfully. "—for some reason, I still can't get you to show up on time?"

"—*Cats need saving*. Little old ladies *always* need help."

She rolled her eyes, but her lips were tugged in a smile, "—you're still ridiculously cheap."

"I'm *saving* for retirement one day, if I ever get to it—"

"*BUT!*" she laughed with a wide grin and amused eyes. She stood up and placed herself right in front of him. Her knees brushed his as she leaned over and looked him straight in the eye—green met his grey and red.

"*You're still you*. Even if you learn a few new tricks along the way."

Kakashi stared at the (again, sort of amazing) woman for a second before he felt a real, genuine smile beneath his mask. His eyes crinkled at her heartfelt attempt to appease his inner turmoil over the strangeness of this whole situation.

She was kind and always did have a big heart.

"Thank you, Sakura."

Emerald eyes sparkled at his words, and she gave him a cute little pat on the head like he was some kind of puppy. It should have bothered him, but he would indulge her just this once.

"Now, *come on!* If we don't hurry, we'll never eat all the things I want

to get before the fireworks start!"

She didn't hesitate in grabbing his sleeve once more and continued to drag him from stall to stall.

The night ran on, and the sun was slowly creeping down as the oranges were fading to a purples and blacks. The string of lanterns strung up above the festival grounds were beginning to softly glow red, and the night was awakening around them.

Kakashi couldn't help but watch her with utter fascination. She was like a short, pink excited child with an enormous appetite—and an endless black hole of a stomach.

...And he somehow found that kind of charming too.

He recalled eleven year old Sakura's habit of dieting and was glad to see she grew out of it. She made it her personal mission to try every staple of the festival, and often forced him to eat right along with her.

By the time the sky was pitch black—Kakashi was stuffed beyond comparison.

He glanced at the woman next to him. She was still chewing on a candy apple as they had finally circled back to dessert somehow.

Pink sticky sugar-covered lips smiled up at him against the bright red of the apple she was biting into, and Kakashi felt like he was slowly getting attached to watching her.

She was short. And childish. Had a temper. Restless. But a perfectionist. Smart. Strong. And Stunning.

And Kakashi was worried he was growing a little bit more and more addicted to the thought of having her around.

She bit the apple with a loud '*crack!*' as the red sugar encasing shattered at her ravaging. Her glowing green eyes grew half-lidded as she chewed, and she moaned—*moaned*—at the taste of the sweet.

Well, fuck.

The hair on the back of his neck couldn't help but stand up at the sound, and his stomach did a weird little flip again.

So, she was pretty—*beautiful*—and he was only a man.

He wouldn't welcome the feeling of attraction though—

How could he?

There he was growing *attached* (to his absolute horror). And what was *he* to *her*?

An old fart of a sensei, maybe? An odd teammate. Maybe even a friend (if he ever admitted that to himself).

...*Definitely* not someone who should be watching her eat an apple like it was a fucking salacious.

She wasn't his. She was *Uchiha* Sakura. She was Sasuke's future wife.

"Come on, you shouldn't walk around while eating that. Let's go get a seat for the fireworks."

He hovered a hand at the small of her back (ever careful not to touch, of course), and led her to a large tree off to the side of the festival grounds.

"Ladies first," he crinkled a smile at her and motioned for her to climb the tree.

"Such a gentleman. Where did these manners come from?" she teased as her chakra infused feet gripped the tree and she made her way up to a high sturdy branch.

"I said I would try to impress. It *is* a date after all."

She hummed happily and sat on the branch as carefully as she could in her yukata without damaging it. He sat alongside her as she began to bite into her apple again, but her eyes were far off. She was unfocused in her thoughts.

"You know, my first date with my husband was at a festival just like this."

Kakashi leaned against the tree trunk and listened as he stuffed his hands up the sleeves of his own yukata since he was currently lacking both pockets and a book. (What do normal people do with their hands?)

"It was so ridiculous. I didn't even know it was a date at the time! He pulled me out of my office—said I'd been working too hard and needed a break." Her eyes glimmered a little bit at the memory.

"He dragged me around and bought me snack after snack. All of my favorites, even though I never told him what I liked...I should have realized it was a date right away—I mean he was acting *so strange*. He always kept a hand on my back! He pulled out a chair for me! He even won me a prize at a shooting booth—a great, big stuffed animal that I still have at home."

She let out a breathy laugh as her eyes shimmered a little more.

"And I just blurted it out—with no thought, and a mouth full of taiyaki!—*'Is this some kind of date?'* ...I thought I broke him for a second: he got so still, I was worried he wasn't breathing. And then his face turned so adorably red! He practically choked out a response."

The pink-haired kunoichi smiled widely behind her half-eaten apple. Her green eyes creased in mirth, and Kakashi swore they were glowing with happiness. Kakashi fought the sudden urge to ruffle her hair.

"And? What did he say?" Kakashi cocked his head and he continued to watch her.

"He said, *'Only if I want it to be'*. He said it with a laugh like it was a joke, but it felt like—in that moment, it was entirely in my hands to decide." Her eyes softened in a small smile as her voice quieted, "And I guess it was."

She hummed for a second in thought.

"Have you ever met someone so damn beautiful—so unique, so intriguing, and thought *'There is no one else in this world like them?'*"

Her voice was breathless and soft. Kakashi tried to swallow, his throat suddenly dry. He should hate this—he really should. Seeing how much she loved Sasuke.

"Every bad thing, and every good thing in their lives made them what they are. No one would ever be like them."

He wanted to look away, but a little voice in the back of his head said, *'don't take your eyes off her'*.

"I thought I was done with childish love and romance. I thought I moved past it at that point! And the way I looked at him was like some kind of ideal. He was my *'ideal man'*—everything I ever wanted but untouchable. Out of reach. I don't know, but I thought *'there is no*

way he would be interested in me'."

"So, I went on dates with other guys sometimes just to stay in the game. And he just kept popping up in the back of my mind—like some kind of silent standard to compare every other guy too. But no one would *ever* compare..."

She shook her head with a wry smile and tucked her long pink bang behind one ear. Kakashi watched on silently.

"But that's not good comparing everyone, ya know? I was just going to accept that no one would ever match up to him, and that's fine—" She let out a slow breath. "...But then there he was, offering himself to me? And I thought '*why have someone similar to him, when I could just have him?*'. Everything I ever wanted! Right in front of me."

She glanced at him, eyes glowing again. "And every hesitation—every concern I had about us being together—just melted away."

She had a small, sweet smile on her lips that looked demure and soft.

It was a smile that Kakashi was absolutely sure wasn't for him to see—a secret glimpse meant to be between husband and wife.

"...So? You told him it was a date then?" He asked slowly. His words felt thick like molasses in his throat.

Her green eyes widened at the question and shifted into a startled stare for a few moments. Like she didn't expect him to have any interest in her story. Her life.

...And then, her entire face morphed into a man-eating grin.

Her eyes sparkled in glee, and her lips shifted into a haughty smile that was wide and full of teeth. She looked proud, like she conquered an unknown force.

"I did," She stated with a prideful boast. "I told him that I would consider it a date, '*but only if he was brave enough to marry me someday*'."

She let out a hearty laugh that echoed in Kakashi's chest, and he stared at the pink-haired woman as in silent astonishment.

"Life is short for shinobi; and I didn't want to waste any more time. I knew what I wanted—and I wanted him. So, I just laid it all out on the

table: we either date to marry, or we don't date at all."

She looked away from him then and studied that red glossy coating of the apple. Her expression was thoughtful.

"It's funny how when life boils down to important decisions, you're forced to be honest with yourself."

Jade eyes cut to him sharply, and Kakashi felt his body still. They were pouring into him—those glimmering pools that he swore were shifting and moving as if she had a spinning Sharingan of her own.

Her eyes narrowed and she smiled at him, but it simultaneously felt both sweet but predatory.

It was devouring to Kakashi, and he felt a shiver run up his spine.

"I'm a creature of *want*, Kakashi. And I have never wanted anyone *more* than how I wanted him at that moment. And after years of marriage together...*I still want him just the same.*"

She lowered her voice to a breathy wistful sort of sigh, "I want and *I want...* and it's never going to stop. Sometimes, I think I'm *insatiable.*"

Kakashi's eyes widened at her confession. He felt his own cheeks burn just above his mask and he pinched the bridge of his nose as he squeezed his eyes shut.

He found that insanely more attractive than he thought he should.

Fucking hell... Sasuke, you lucky bastard.

Was it right for a grown man to be envious of an eleven year old boy's future? *Probably not.*

...Was he? *Uncontrollably so.*

So, he did the reasonable thing, and suffocated whatever inner perversion was trying to set free. If all the blood in his body was rushing south—he was determined to reroute it by sheer force of will.

When he finally calmed himself enough to glance up at the pinkette, Kakashi was startled to see her watching from the side of her eyes. A nervous hand was covering her slightly pink face, but her eyes stayed on his in amusement.

"...Jeez that was embarrassing to say out loud," she laughed a small

nervous laugh. "My boldness worked in my favor though. I was a little too forward—a little too eager, for *sure*—but he seemed to respond happily. We were essentially *engaged* by the end of our first date."

She twisted the forgotten apple in her fingers idly with a small smile.

"Apparently, he had been courting me for *weeks*—and of course, I had *no* idea. He would bring me tea or lunch, or sometimes we went for walks together or sparred in between work. But I thought it was all normal for us... I'm not sure if I'm just *really* dense, or he's *too* subtle, but it never even occurred to me that something shifted in our relationship until that day at the festival."

She was staring off now in thought, and Kakashi continued to watch her silently as the red lanterns dimmed.

"...I wonder if he'll remember this? *How embarrassing...* " she mumbled under her breath.

But before Kakashi could ask any more about it, a huge *boom!* exploded above them.

His first instinct was to reach for a kunai, but then the crowd gasped and cheered in excitement as the fireworks burst into life in the black sky.

A wonder-filled gasp left the woman beside him, and her eyes stretched to search above them. Her bubblegum hair changed color under the pyrotechnic light, and Kakashi was at a loss of words.

Instead, he shut his left eye after realizing it had been open this entire time without his noticing and leaned his head back against the tree.

He liked this night. He wouldn't mind replaying the memory in his head with his Sharingan.

But she would be gone soon. And with her, a seal would activate—

And then he mourned half-heartedly, that one day...he may not remember this night.

He may not remember *her*. Or at least, this version of her.

(And that thought quietly gutted him.)

Chapter End Notes

FUN FACT#1: The Daimyo's rooms are set up like a Ryokan; which traditionally means all services are brought to a guest's room.

FUN FACT#2: it wouldn't be a Japanese Rom-com without the "summer festival" date lol. Tanabata (or Hoshimatsuri "the Star festival") is really magical though, and I get why it's so cliché. If you ever get the chance to experience it, I highly recommend.

FUN FACT#3: Sakura's first date story is based somewhat off my own experience with my husband. I was younger; he was older. And "Date to marry" is almost the exact words I told my husband years ago. It shocked the hell out of him lol. I'm sure it's not everyone's cup of tea, but again...self-indulgent work hehe. The context of Sakura's relationship/thoughts will be explained later.

A/N: Ya'll. WOW!--This fic went up 100 kudos in one week. Is this what happens when I let Kakashi kill a few people? (I'm looking at *you* 100 people 😏 lol)

A/N#2: Some of you have found me already, but I am on Tumblr too :)

<https://www.tumblr.com/blog/scarecrows-to-cherrytrees>

I am your Friend

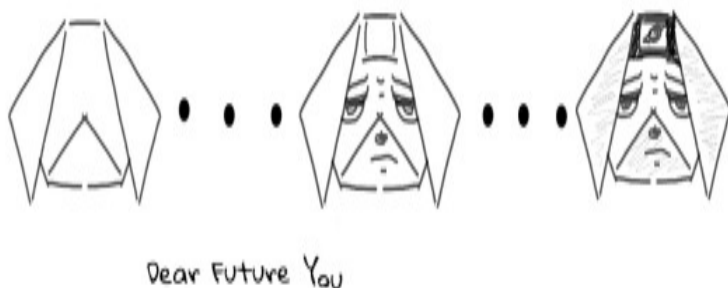
Chapter Notes

Ya'll...this is it. The last hurdle. The final climb up the hill...buckle your seat belts; put your hands up like a roller coaster. Cuz after this, it's a long ride.

A/N: What an amazing response last chapter! Like, truly. WOW! Thank you to all the fabulous commenters (you know who you are!) and shout out to sj2002 for finishing uni! Congrats!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

[image]



[image]

Chapter 6: I am your Friend

Sakura wasn't sure what she did wrong, but she must have done *something*.

All she got were curt replies, stagnant silences, and maybe a few polite but otherwise obviously fake eye-crinkle smiles for the rest of the night.

When they returned to their room after the fireworks, they found a table full of prime steaks and decadent ribs laid out in the middle. On the table next to the numerous plates, was a little hand-written card that said 'To the nice ninja doggies, From: Hikari <3' that was scribbled

with a messy handwriting and decorated with tiny drawings of paws and bones.

She watched Kakashi call his pack, and blithely pointed at the table for them as if saying it was okay to dig in.

And then as if in a daze, he floated away from the noisy feasting of his canine companions; and disappeared into the bathroom with a blank stare like a soulless yokai.

They each handed off their borrowed yukata to the awaiting attendants and readied for bed. By the time she returned from her nightly routine, she was just in time...

...to watch Kakashi pick up his futon that was currently next to hers in the middle of the room and *DRAG* it all the way to the furthest corner of the room.

As far away as possible from her.

...If *that* doesn't hurt one's ego, she's not sure what does.

But she grinned and bore it. Or tried to. (She was not grinning at all.)

Before the sun rose the next morning, both shinobi were ready and waiting to head home.

They dressed in their newly patched-up ANBU uniforms. Said their goodbyes to Hikari-chan. And donned their masks.

And so: '*Hound and Fox*' made their way through the dense southern Fire Country quickly and quietly as possible.

They walked most of the way, as Sakura insisted they should take it easy after the physical exhaustion of the mission. She expected Kakashi to complain about the slow pace, since it was in fact, an ANBU mission (and time is always of the essence), but instead he leisurely strolled beside her with little objection and little reaction (if any).

He seemed to be in deep thought to Sakura, so she did her best not to interfere.

Alternating between walking and running for hours until the green gate of Konohagakure was in sight. By the time they reported to the Hokage and submitted their mission report, the sun was already

dimming in the afternoon sky.

She tried not to get her hopes up as she stepped into the office.

And good thing she didn't...

No Naruto. No Sasuke. *No one.*

There was no sign of any other '*temporal guests*' while they were away, and Sakura was desperately trying to keep her anxiety about the situation down.

Kakashi was acting weird. And no rescue was in sight.

Lovely. Just, *perfect.*

As 'fun' as this has all been...She had a life to get back to. Her family—her kids. Her husband. Her friends/teammates.

She needed to get *home.*

Oh, gods. She was starting to panic—

She could feel her head swimming as she tried her best to breathe her way to some resemblance of control. She breathed in and out over and over again.

Kakashi, on the other hand, looked nothing but bored the whole day.

...But she could feel something was going on beneath the surface.

He was always like that—a storm in the far off distance. Brewing quietly until he was lost in the eye of it.

She knew they were both distraught about something, and she could feel them tittering on the ledge. All it would take, would be for one to fall—and the other would follow.

And then...like the Kami-sent, senbon chewing, bandana wearing blessing that he is...

Genma arrived.

The two shinobi were halfway down the steps of the Hokage tower before Sakura heard his familiar voice behind them.

"Hey, Pinkie!" Genma shouted at her. "How about you come get drinks

with us tonight?"

Sakura blinked stupidly at the offer.

She still had her ANBU mask on, although Kakashi decided to remove his (because who *didn't* know Kakashi was in ANBU?). She tried to meet the Copy-nin's eye to see his reaction, but he stubbornly refused her and stayed a wall of detachment. He slouched beside her, hands in his pockets, and no sign of any outward disturbances.

"Hi, Genma...I'm sort of on lock down right now? You know I can't go anywhere without my baby-sitter."

He laughed warmly and Sakura felt her shoulders relax a little more at the sound.

"Don't worry, the big grump is invited too. He's been hogging you all week, and maybe the rest of us want a chance at some fortune telling?"

He grinned at her with the same charming yet cocky grin he always had—senbon and all. Sakura couldn't help but smile back.

He was sort of like Naruto in that way—always loud and a little abrasive, but caring and warm. He was shrewder though, and more observant to those around him. It was infectious how he drew people to him and was able to know just what to say to comfort them.

She glanced at Kakashi. She actually wanted to go.

The bar scene stopped being her place years ago after she started focusing on her family, but with the way both her and Kakashi were brooding, this may be exactly what she needed to get her mind off her situation.

"I'm supposed to be guarding her, not taking her out on dates with a bunch of jonin," Kakashi grumbled with a bored drawl, with his face securely hidden behind his familiar mask.

She scoffed under her breath. *Didn't they just go on a date to a festival together?*

"Guarding her from *who*?" The brown haired ANBU turned to her. "Oh, *come on!* We're friends, right? In the future?"

"I mean...yes, sure," Sakura replied, unsure of how much she should

really be saying with them out in the open in front of the Hokage building.

"Then you know what to expect! No problem, right?" His pointed eyes shifted to the Copy-Nin next to her. "And friends deserve some hospitality, no? I mean the Hokage just dragged her on a *S-rank* mission, and kami knows—you're not always the most *jovial* to be around. So, how about we let her have a little fun, hm?"

Sakura wanted to object to that a little and argue that Kakashi has actually been a wonderful host. But before she could get the words out, a whirlwind of green crashed into Kakashi like a force of nature.

"*MY MOST ETERNAL RIVAL!*" bellowed the Green Beast with little regard for volume. He slung an arm around Kakashi's neck and pulled him down in a faux choked hold as he laughed with a deep voice.

Kakashi, on the other hand, looked as if this day could not get any worse. Sakura was sure his patience for the day was running on fumes.

"Yo." Kakashi greeted with a sigh.

"*Gai!* Just the man to convince Hatake! Perfect timing." Genma fist bumped the Green Beast with a laugh.

Familiar bushy brows and gleaming smiles turned towards Sakura. She was thoroughly amused by the men's interactions but wasn't sure how much the other jonin knew about her circumstances.

So, she chose to smile and play along as if it was their first meeting.

"Hello, you must be Maito Gai!" She bowed a little in a polite greeting. She was still wearing her Fox mask but she tried to appear receptive. "Kakashi has told me all about you. I'm Sakura, nice to meet you."

"Ah, this must be the rumored Pink Blossom that has mysteriously gotten hold of our dear Copy-Nin! The entire village is talking about it: a beautiful pink-haired seductress that has clawed her way to capturing the heart of Konoha's '*Sharingan-no-Kakashi*'. No one knows who she is? Or where she comes from! But only that my eternal rival follows after her." He laughed full heartedly. "Tell me Kakashi, is it true? Has your heart really been stolen?"

Kakashi visibly stilled. Then his face slowly morphed into an expression of long-suffering pain. And maybe, annoyance.

Ouch. What did she ever do to him?

"...Rival?" Gai froze as well, staring down at him in his choke hold. Genma flicked his senbon in his mouth and cocked his head in an interested gaze.

"—*Clearly!!* The village is mistaken, Gai-san." Sakura pushed her voice to a saccharine sweet lull. "No seductress here. Unfortunately, Kakashi was issued as my ANBU detail for a few days. I'm afraid I might have overworked him a bit."

Both men flickered their eyes back and forth between Kakashi and herself. Silence followed awkwardly.

"...Right." Genma's eyes narrowed. "Sure."

"Of course, Sakura-san! I jest entirely. Ha ha ha...You see, my dear Rival's unusual behavior is bound to stir up rumors, no matter what he does! And such a youthful story, the rumor was!"

At this point, Gai was now violently shaking Kakashi back and forth in tune with his wild laughter as Kakashi continued to be whipped around in his choke hold.

When Gai did finally let go, he grasped Sakura's hands within his own and moved straight into her personal space.

"I simply wanted to know if a new opponent had appeared to fight for the title of Kakashi's Eternal Competitor. Should we battle for the claim?"

Sakura took two steps back from the Green Beast, and kept her voice even. Her smile strained.

"No, no no... *really Gai-san!* The title is all yours. I promise!" She squeezed his hands for good measure. And shot a desparte glance at Genma. "I apologize for taking him away from you for so long...*In fact*, Kakashi was just telling me how tired he was from this last mission, and how nothing would be better than spending a few hours among friends."

"I'm pretty sure I *never* said tha—"

"—*well ain't that something?* I was *JUST* saying we should go out tonight for drinks. All—" Genma coughed. "All of us."

The bandana wearing man grabbed the back collar of Kakashi's flak jacket just as he was just starting to turn around to leave. "What do you think, Gai?"

"Such a truly beautiful idea, my friends! Let us come together for a night of libations and joy!" She watched as Gai let her go and excitedly moved to slap the backs of Genma and Kakashi forcibly. "I'll gather all our companions and we shall see you all tonight!" He turned back to Sakura. "You must come as well, my most youthful Blossom! *Promise me*, you will attend!"

"Of course, Gai-san." She smiled behind her Fox mask. "I wouldn't miss it for the world."

"Excellent! And please, just 'Gai' would be enough." He patted her shoulder rather gently in comparison to the two men. "Well then. See you tonight, Kakashi! Be prepared, as I intend to win in all drinking contests!"

He gave a sparkling smile and competitive wave, and off he went leaving nothing but a trail of dust behind him. Completely oblivious to Kakashi's thunderous expression.

"So...we can all get dinner there together. See you both around 7pm?" Genma asked, full of hope.

Kakashi groaned and turned to start walking away. He threw a tired wave over his shoulder, as Sakura jogged to catch up with him.

"Sure, Genma. See you at 8 o'clock."

"7pm, Kakashi! Don't be late!" He called after him.

"Got it, 9 for sure."

"*Kakashi!* " Genma yelled in warning.

"I'm just kidding, Genma...*definitely* 10 o'clock."

"*Hatake, you Bastard!?* 7PM!!"

Sakura felt his hand wrap around her wrist. She watched as he looked over his shoulder to Genma, and with an insufferable two-fingered salute and annoying eye-crinkle, he shushined them away.

Kakashi was a patient man. Well, at least he had *become* a patient man.

He surely cannot claim that he has always had this trait. It was something that he had grown into. Like his height, or his scars.

And as the punches kept rolling in, and funerals kept becoming a normal occurrence in his life, and pieces of him kept getting lost bit by bit—

Somewhere along the way he learned to sit back, observe, and *wait*.

Or even better: *run away*. And then wait.

(Maybe patience and cowardice were synonymous to him. Who knows?)

He has concluded that Future-Kakashi most definitely...probably... *slightly* had some sort of interest for Uchiha Sakura.

Hell, he had only spent a few days with her, and he was halfway there himself. He was practically sporting a semi anytime she did something remotely sexy.

(Embarrassing. That's all he can say.)

That was his dreary future—that was going to be his *life*.

He was lusting, pining, maybe even a little enamored or whatever you wanted to call it—

With *someone else's wife*.

Not just any someone: but the one person he wanted to save. Itachi's baby brother. Obito's last kin.

Probably the one person he shouldn't screw over besides Naruto.

(Well, *fuck*.)

So, as soon as he realized he was getting in a little too deep—He bottled all the goopy feelings, and all the alluring smiles, and all that

shit up and decided: *that's Future-Kakashi's problem.*

Not his.

He could stay away from her. At least, in theory.

So, he did.

The trip back was polite, but distant. He made sure never to touch, and never to let his eyes linger too long.

(Minato always did say: *Distance is key for a shinobi. A matter of life or death*).

He just wanted to go home to his little apartment to sit her in one corner, and him in another, and *wait*.

Just *wait* for his future genin to come and collect his problems.

And then it would all *disappear*—which was somehow equal parts soul crushing yet relieving to him all at the same time.

But of course, they had to run into *fucking Genma*.

And instead of executing this brilliant plan of just reading in a corner and waiting patiently for this catastrophe to be over, *he was going to a bar tonight with all his comrades and Sakura*.

Because: she looked at him with deep green eyes that begged to go. And Gai wanted to lose at one more competition. And Genma was a dick.

And maybe—just maybe—because *he was an idiot who couldn't stick to his own plans*.

So, he shushined them away after making sure to bother the hell out of Genma one last time as pay back. Kakashi dropped her wrist at the doorway and without a single word he left her to go take a shower.

As he scrubbed dust and debris from their travels away, his mind reeled at his own stupidity for agreeing to this. By the time he dried and dressed in his usual blue jonin attire and walked back out into his tiny studio apartment, he had rebuilt his mental walls.

Stay away. All I have to do is just stay away.

Except...

...he found her sprawling upside down on his old grey couch with her head hanging down by the floor and her feet flung over the back of the couch above her. Her hands were tightly clasped on her stomach and her eyes were shut.

And when one gleaming eye peeked open to stare at him like some sort of cat, all intelligent and pensive, Kakashi's body moved of its own accord.

He sat down right next to her—

For fuck's sake, why can't I just stay away?

He mimicked her bizarre lounging position with his feet hanging far further over the couch and his head hanging upside down next to hers. He stared across the room taking in the inverted scenery.

"Is there a reason you decided to turn into a giant pink bat?"

Sakura laughed. "This is something I picked up from my daughter when she's upset."

"Ah, I see..." Like that made this somehow normal. "...and are you upset?"

She turned to face him, but he refused to meet her eyes. Like any mature adult.

"I..." she hesitated by biting her lip. "I think I'm ready to go home."

He nodded, as his disappointment spiked a little. Of course she was. What more was there to say? Silence permeated the small room a few moments longer.

"And you?...why are you upset?" she asked softly.

Kakashi cast a side glance with his single eye as he observed her quietly. She turned away from him again, stubbornly keeping her eyes straight ahead to no doubt give him privacy.

"I'm not sure. I think the future may be a little scarier than I was expecting."

A little frown appeared in the corner of her lips. "What makes you say that?"

"Intuition. And maybe a few lucky guesses." *And scary, irrational*

feelings.

He felt her body stiffen next to him, as her hands tightened in their grasp. A few minutes of silence passed, as neither felt the need to speak.

He thought of his nightmares. He thought of the ghosts that follow his every step. His regrets, and the different actions he would take.

“...When you first arrived, you were adamant about not changing the future. Why not change things?”

She hummed wistfully in thought. “Well, a *lot* of reasons, really...but probably the biggest one is because of the war.”

“...the next war?” Kakashi felt his stomach drop.

He knew they were shinobi, and war was inevitable for them. But he had *hoped* ...maybe this generation didn’t have to suffer like his had.

“I *thought* about it. I thought about telling you and Sandaime everything. The things you could prevent...the measures you could take...but at the end of the day, there is no guarantee. There are too many *variables*.”

She placed her hands flat on the floor beside her head and flipped her legs over until she somersaulted out of her bat-like position. She turned lying on her stomach across from him on the floor, her face level with his despite him still being upside down.

“This war isn’t like the others,” Sakura sighed. “For the first time in all of shinobi history: *we unite*. All the Hidden Villages come together to fight side by side. And after the war, there is true *peace*. Everything has changed—no more undermining each other. No more blatant killing and hatred. It’s...truly *amazing*.”

She rolled on her back, her pink hair fanning out just close enough to almost touch his own. Her eyes staring heavily at the ceiling.

“But we *barely won*...I mean seriously it was by the skin of our teeth. With a miracle and the whim of some questionable people’s change of heart. All of it—all of humanity—was just moments away from being lost.”

He watched her jaw tighten, as her eyes narrowed.

“And I can’t risk that. What if I change things and someone who was pivotal in the battle dies too early? What if people who were spared pain from their past, don’t fight as hard as they should? What if some mad men decide not to change their mind? I can’t. I *can’t* risk losing it all just because it would make me feel better.”

Kakashi thought of his own regrets. He knew he would change it all if he could. Maybe he was more selfish in his pain.

Or maybe they were at different points in their lives—and she just had more to lose.

Sakura let out a self-deprecating laugh beside him.

“I mean, what if I end up changing *everything*. My husband. My kids? There was even a point right after the war where I was considering moving to Suna to work on poisons. And the gods know Kankuro always had a crush on me. What if I come home and all my kids are purple face-paint-wearing puppet masters? *Can you imagine?* ”

She laughed brightly, but halted mid laugh when she bent her neck back to look at him.

“...Kankuro?” Kakashi couldn’t help but ask.

“*Oh, shoot*—never mind.” She stifled another laugh. “I don’t think you’ll meet him for another week or so.”

“I’m looking forward to it.” He deadpanned.

Sakura just smiled at him sweetly, her eyes shining with amusement.

“Do you feel better now? I’m not promising the future is perfect or without its own loss. But it’s really not that bad.” Her eyes brightened a little more. “I can’t speak for everyone, but *I’m happy*. Naruto and Sasuke are happy. Even *you’re* happy. I can’t ask for much more than that.”

Kakashi scoffed under his breath. He didn’t quite believe her assessment of his own happiness.

“Sure, Sakura.” He pushed his feet down over the side of the couch and finally sat up. He closed his eyes and lounged his head back against the old couch as the blood drained from his head and back to the rest of his body. “And you? Feeling better?”

After a few seconds of relief from the pressure in his head, he peeked his own eye open to see her.

Sakura didn't answer right away. Instead, he watched as her penetrating green eyes raked over him.

His stomach coiled...slow and deep, as his eyes hooded at her assessment. They traveled around his body shrewdly, languidly before pausing to meet his own. Kakashi's breath stalled in his throat, but he refused to break eye contact.

"Yes, I think I am." A smile broke out on her face, that seemed more reminiscent of a smirk. "...*If* you're done avoiding me, that is."

Oh. He felt his stomach coil a little tighter. *She wasn't going to let him off easy.*

He inhaled sharply through his nose, and felt his jaw click as it tightened even more.

He tired—*he really fucking tried*—to tear his gaze away from her emerald one that were just *challenging* him in all the *right* ways.

It was rare that someone ever called him out on his bullshit. Some were too afraid to confront him. Most learned to just live with it. But he had forgotten—*this Sakura* is formidable.

And—*Fuck.*

He wanted to rise to her challenge. He wanted to flirt. She was making it too easy—and *it was too fucking dangerous.*

"For now, at least." Kakashi replied with his voice a little too low, and a little too graveled. He hoped she didn't notice.

He swallowed hard, and desperately tried to keep his eye from drifting down the length of her body since she was still sprawled out before him on his carpeted floor.

Not my problem. His. Future-Kakashi's problem.

He cleared his throat to the best of his ability, and finally tore his gaze away.

"After all, you do have a date with half the jonin in the village tonight, Sakura. It would be considered rude to be avoiding the guest of honor," he tried to joke. He needed to change the mood.

She laughed (thankfully) giving him a little moment of respite, before letting out a little snort and wrinkling her nose. “I don’t think that has *ever* stopped you from trying to avoid people before.”

Kakashi shrugged. He rubbed the back of his neck awkwardly, while trying to keep his eye anywhere but on her. They sat in silence.

“So...” she started quietly, but jovial. “I know you’re usually late to these types of things. But I could really, *really* use a drink.” She smiled mischievously. “...Wanna piss Genma off by showing up early and already being half-way drunk by the time he arrives?”

Oh, he liked her.

Kakashi smiled, his eyes definitely crinkled. “It’s like you *know me* so well, Sakura.”

She laughed—*definitely* a woman after his own heart.

~~~~~ さくら ~~~~~

“—*All I’m saying* is that I still think Jiraiya would win against Orochimaru.” Sakura slurred a little while sipping her sake. Gods it’s been forever since she’d drank this much. Her cheeks were already feeling warm, and her head buzzed delightfully.

“Jiraiya is an amazing shinobi, but I still think he lacks resolve. I mean have you ever seen them fight? Orochimaru’s ruthless and detached. A model shinobi—” Kakashi stumbled over his words, “Well, before all *that*. Before he went crazy.”

Sakura couldn’t help but snort. “I don’t need to. I’ve seen what Naruto can do, and if Jiraiya is half as good as Naruto, then I still think he can win.” Kakashi shook his head but leaned over to refill her sake cup. “Besides—underneath it all, Orochimaru is actually a big softy.”

She watched as Kakashi choked on his sake next to her despite her not actually seeing him drink. He wheezed for a second as she tilted her head back and laughed loudly. The bartender cast them a weary glance.

“What?”

“I’m telling you. I’ve done research with the man—he wears a cute little flower apron in the greenhouses. He gave these adorable *nicknames* to some of our lab equipment. And he *loves* kids. I seriously wouldn’t be surprised if he had a child of his own hidden somewhere secret. *That’s how good he is with kids.*”

“You’re lying.”

“Nope! Yamato knows.” She dropped her voice to whisper, but her drunken self was far too loud for such things. “—*I secretly think they are together.*”

“Yamato?” He eyed her questioningly. His own drunken shade of pink creeping up on his cheek and ears.

“Oh—I meant Tenzou.”

He blinked at her slowly. Then— “*Tenzou?!*”

Sakura just laughed even louder, as she slapped Kakashi on the back with a little too much force. He grumbled under his breath next to her in disbelief.

“Are you *sure* that you and I are from the same timeline? Or even the same universe?”

Sakura couldn’t help but grin. “I’m pretty sure. You’re the same as I remember you back then. And I haven’t seen anything else that’s different. Therefore!—*your* future is *mine*—including the flower-apron-wearing-Orochimaru and all.”

Kakashi hummed quietly in thought. She watched his long pale finger trace the rim on the small sake cup that was dwarfed in his large hand.

“...And Tenzou is happy then?”

Sakura sipped her own. “I think so. To be honest he’s closer to you than myself.”

“Me? I’m just his former Captain.”

*Oh no*, you’re quite good friends.” She laughed. “I guess I never mentioned it—he’s part of ‘my boys’. Him and this other kid named Sai join our group a few years from now. *You would not believe his*

*personality*. It's freaking *terrible*."

She leaned in, with a finger to her lips and a slurred smile on her face. She felt great. Why doesn't she do this more often?

"*Don't tell the rest of them*," she whispered loudly in conspiracy, "But Sai might be my favorite—after my husband, of course."

He scoffed at her but his eye creased in amusement. "'*Your boys*'...I never knew you were into having a harem, Sakura-chan."

Oh...she blinked at him, and grinned at his words. She tried to snort but it morphed into an unattractive hiccup. Maybe she should slow down the drinking?

"*Please*. I'm a happily married woman, Kakashi. And I definitely don't need a harem—my husband keeps me sated and fulfilled—*all on his own*." She couldn't help but give him a wicked grin and wink.

Damn, she really should start metabolizing this liquor out of her system...

Kakashi visibly shuddered. "I *really* did not need to know that."

"I *really* think you did~,," she sang to herself drunkenly and took another sip of her sake. "Besides, we are all just good friends. You complain about us, but I know you care."

He hummed quietly at the back of his throat in thought. It was deep and resounding, and made Sakura shiver a little at the sound. She straightened up and shook her head trying to refocus.

"You are a good friend, Kakashi. Ask anyone who is showing up tonight at this bar." She nudged him with his elbow. "I know you like to think of yourself as some kind of lone wolf, all sulking and alone. But they *aren't just* comrades and coworkers...everyone here thinks of you as a *friend*. And there will be even more in the future."

He scoffed and leaned back against the back of the barstool while crossing his arms.

"No one thinks that. I'm '*Friend-Killer Kakashi*', remember? The only friends I had are dead." He glanced at the ceiling like it was more interesting than their conversation. "Well, except Gai. Thankfully, I think Gai might be indestructible."

Irritation bubbled up in her chest, and frown tugged at her lips. She considered dumping the rest of her sake right over that silver head of his.

“You’re *wrong*.” She spit out. He shrugged, but remained silent. “You care more for people than you let on. I know you do.”

He sat up a little straighter, his shoulders tensing as if on defense, but his voice remained the same lazy drawl. “Why...? Because you’re ‘*my friend*’ too?”

Sakura turned towards him, giving him her full attention. She let her eyes roll over his face but his remained blank and passive.

“Yes.” She bit out the word, trying to suppress a growl. “I am your friend. And I know how you don’t let them go. I know how you carry them with you—how you refuse to let them be forgotten.”

He stared at her—his gaze a little sharper, and his jaw a little tighter.

“You think I wouldn’t *notice*?” She taunted as she leaned forward placing an elbow on the table and her chin in the palm of her hand. “You use Obito’s tardiness and excuses. I hear you eat ramen the same way as Kushina. ‘*Sukea*’ just happens to look remarkably like a young girl I’ve seen in a photo—brown hair and purple paint.”

He exhaled in long breath and turned his face toward the ceiling again. She wasn’t sure if it was out of frustration or discomfort.

“It’s okay though—to keep little bits and pieces of those that are gone,” Sakura murmured quietly. “And accepting others as friends doesn’t mean erasing the past ones. I *know* you would die for any of your nakama, Kakashi...but you’re allowed to live with them too. Enjoy life with them.”

He hummed quietly next to her. She watched as he brought his hands up and clasped them behind his head reminding her of Naruto. After a moment of thought, she looked up to find his lone slate eye observing her.

He crinkled an eye smile, but it still seemed a little sad to Sakura.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Kakashi finally said. It felt like a lie.

She snorted at his veiled dismissal of the topic. Her flushed cheeks felt warm as she swirled the little sake cup distractingly.

“As *endearing* as your lonely habit is...it *does* worry me. I mean what if something ever happens to Gai? Should I expect you to start wearing green onesies in remembrance?”

She shuddered at the thought as he chuckled alongside her.

“Just imagine if something happens to *you*?” He smiled— Sakura couldn’t see it behind his mask, but she was sure it was a true genuine smile. Her stomach warmed from the alcohol and his words. “I think I might just have to dye my hair *pink*.”

Her face split into a giant grin. She couldn’t help but tilt her head back and laugh.

“You always did say pink was your favorite color,” she teased.

He reached out and ruffled her hair affectionately. She tried not to drunkenly sway into the touch.

“I wonder *why*.”

His voice was deep and rich—and her insides melted at the tone.

Sakura wanted to savor the moment—

But all good things must come to an end apparently.

The bar door slammed open behind them, letting in the last few rays of sunlight into the darkened room. She recognized the clamor of voices right away. Kakashi snapped his hand away from her and sighed.

Sakura whipped her head away from the offending sounds and let out a small groan as her head pulsed a bit in discomfort.

“*Kakashi?! You. absolute. bastard.*” Genma stormed into the bar in anger. “*This is where you’ve been?! I’ve ran all over this damn city trying to find you, you damn ungrateful—*”

“Yo, Genma.” He threw a mocked salute. “Fancy seeing you here...In fact, aren’t you *late*?”

Genma’s frown deepened exponentially, but before he could open his mouth, Kakashi continued.

“Didn’t we say 7pm, Sakura?” The Copy-nin squinted at the clock above the bar in exaggeration. “Let’s see, if it’s 8:00 now...that means

I was... *at least* two hours early. Now, *how did that happen?*”

Genma stared at the man as the blood rushed to his face. Sakura could swear the senbon in his mouth was going to snap under the pressure of his jaw.

“*You fucking—*”

“MY ETERNAL RIVAL!” bellowed a familiar voice.

“Yo!” Kakashi stood from his place at the bar and as he passed Genma, gave him a patronizing slap on the back and eye crinkle. Sakura couldn’t help but watch the two jonin in amusement.

She pushed her chakra throughout her body, and relished the cool feel of it working on her liver and head. The haziness of alcohol slowly began to subside as she turned to face the incoming batch of shinobi.

Kakashi stood along with Gai, hands in his pocket and his single eye sparkling at a new challenge.

Behind ‘*Konoha’s Green Beast*’, were several stragglers—some she had forgotten could look so young—Kurenai, Anko, Yugao, Raido...

...*others* were ghosts that she hadn’t thought of in a long time—such as a young Asuma and Hayate—although she really only knew the latter from stories told by their loved ones.

Her eyes roamed over the group. Right now, they were whole and complete—at least, in *this* moment of time.

The thought sobered her quickly.

She tried to smile as Gai passed her off from person to person with introductions, but it all felt a little too forced—*She stumbled* when she got to Asuma, Ino’s crying face forever ingrained in her memory. *She turned her eyes away* when Yugao introduced Hayate as her boyfriend.

She was *failing* at remaining neutral.

And Kakashi’s lone charcoal eye followed her in the room. Too intent. Too intelligent.

So, she bit the inside of her cheek; she squared her shoulders and shook her head of any fleeting thoughts. And when Anko offered a friendly shot—she gulped it down and refused to look back.

*She needed to get herself together.*

~~~~~ かかし ~~~~~

Kakashi watched Sakura from the bar. She was huddled with several of the other shinobi and was held captive by one of Anko's drunken stories that he will admit—are hilariously funny.

And she was...well, for lack of a better description:

She was *deliciously* drunk.

All pink cheeks and glowing eyes; and bright smiles and hearty laughs. Her voice was far above the acceptable volume of any respectable establishment. And there may have been a little sway in her lithe body like she was actually sitting on a boat that was rocking back and forth, instead of in a bar seat on solid ground.

And she seemed happy...

Which he was pleased with—because for a few minutes something happened, and she visibly *dulled*. She was fidgeting and twisting in her own skin, and her eyes shifted away from everyone in discomfort.

And suddenly Kakashi wasn't so sure about this meeting of jonin anymore. Maybe there was a history here that hadn't happened yet? Or *worse*—maybe those 'losses' she spoke of were in this very room...?

“—*Kakashi*? Will you leave the damn lady alone, please.” Genma placed his back against the bar beside him, elbows on the countertop and a drink in hand, facing out toward the scene of Sakura and their friends laughing together. “I'm pretty sure she can take care of herself, and you're staring a hole through her.”

The Copy-nin shrugged. “It's my job to keep an eye on her.”

Genma laughed mockingly. “Sure! It's your job to make sure she doesn't defect or kill us all in our sleep. Not ogle the little lady with lovesick eyes—well I guess—*eye*, in your case.

Kakashi couldn't help but huff out an annoyed sigh, and chose to stare at the ceiling in a blatant attempt to ignore his—

Well...I guess you could call him a 'friend'.

"It's certainly a sight to see. I've never seen you quite like this before—the way you watch her—it's like you're dying to get closer, but trying to run as far away as possible at the same time."

Nothing but silence followed his statement.

"*Oh?* No comment, or snide remark?" Genma chuckled, and dropped his voice to a serious tone. "See it's real simple, Kakashi—*do you want her?*"

Kakashi felt his jaw tighten as he turned around to face the bar, and away from Sakura.

He wrapped his hand around the small glass he'd been nursing throughout the night but refused to face the bandana-wearing nin. Genma watched him, scrutinizingly.

"Ah, I see. Then I guess you don't mind if I give it a go, do you?"

The glass cracked in his hand.

"Well, fuck. That's not a good sign." Genma laughed, slapped his back hard.

"She's *married*, Genma."

"So, I heard."

"Then you know she's off limits," he growled.

"Who's she married to again?"

"Sasuke Uchiha my—" Kakashi swallowed. "My student."

"Uh-huh, uh-huh," Genma nodded his head slowly and spun the senbon in his mouth like he was digesting the answer thoughtfully. "And she said that to you, did she?"

Kakashi ran all their conversations through his head. "She didn't have to. It's obvious."

"Right, right..." Genma plucked the senbon from his mouth as his eyes narrowed. "So here's the thing, Kakashi: I'd bet my left testicle that *that* is utter bullshit."

His eyes snapped up from the cracked glass in his hand to look at his friend in bewilderment. Genma was just staring at whatever scene was playing on behind him, he could hear Sakura's light giggles among the laughter.

"And what makes you say that?" Kakashi asked cautiously.

Genma dragged his eyes to meet his own as he placed the senbon back in his mouth. A slow smirk spread across his face, and he tipped his lips in the direction of their friends, using the senbon to point, as if to say '*take a look*'.

"Because she hasn't stopped staring at you either."

Kakashi swiveled on his bar seat so fast, he was sort of impressed he didn't just topple off. She was leaning into Gai while he slung an arm around her as the group were all singing a truly dreadful drinking song that was too loud and definitely off key.

Her cheeks were still flushed, and from here they were starting to blend into the pink of her hair but her *eyes*—her eyes were on him.

Jade sparkled as she smiled, and when their gaze met—her smile brightened just a little bit more.

"You see *that*?" Genma scoffed lightly in amusement. "*That's* not a look you give your '*dear old sensei*'."

Kakashi sat there, taking in the scene. She continued laughing and singing, but she never dropped her gaze.

No. No. no—

"You're fucking with me," he whispered out quietly.

"No, I'm definitely *not*." Genma turned towards the bar and motioned the bartender for another drink.

"I know you want to sit here, and mope and brood about how absolutely hopeless this whole situation is but—" Genma knocked back a shot. "See here's what I've learned after years of practice, Kakashi—a *woman will tell you if there's a chance*. Some are subtle; some are amazingly bold. But if you actually listen to what they're saying, and notice the way they are when they're around you—then you'll know. And *that woman*—that woman can't take her damn eyes off of you."

Kakashi huffed out an exhausting sigh. He ran his palm down his face, and his fingers through his hair. He was suddenly tired and nervous at the same time.

“There is *no way* that is true.”

“Why?” Genma twirled the lip of the cup nonchalantly. “Because she’s married?”

“*Yes, because she’s fucking married.*”

“...And you think it’s to the Uchiha? She’s Uchiha Sakura?”

“Well, it makes the most sense. She’s been in love with him since they were kids. There is an eleven year old version of her *right now*, that’s in love with him. *Who else* would she marry?”

“I told you: my left nut. That woman over there is *Hatake* Sakura.”

Kakashi felt his head slam on the bar in front of him as the air knocked out of his lungs. “You’re insane.”

No.No.no. Don’t want it. Future-Kakashi’s problem—

“Not everyone is Asuma and Kurenai—not everyone marries their first love and stays together forever. Some take a little a longer. *Why can’t it be you?*”

His Sharingan almost burned as it sifted through memories.

—rebuilding a clan, then?

Honestly? It’s hard work.

Kakashi scoffed face down into the bar top. “She said she was rebuilding a clan.”

“Yeah well, the Hatake clan is a party of one right now. It could use some rebuilding.”

“I don’t *want* to rebuild my damn clan.”

Genma smirked. “I bet you would if it was with that pink-haired little spit fire.”

Kakashi glared. “No, you don’t understand how she talks about him.”

...Have you ever met someone so damn beautiful—

...never wanted anyone more than how I wanted him—

I'm a happily married woman, Kakashi.

"Kakashi, I was there. '*The most powerful shinobi of all time*'? Haven't you been in line for Hokage since—I *don't know*—Minato died? The only reason they didn't give you the hat already is because you're constantly running from it."

The Copy-nin scoffed. "I'm not going to be Hokage, Genma. I don't want to be."

"Well, see? That's the thing—*You don't know that*. Fifteen years a long ass time; and maybe she bats her pink eyelashes at you and tells you what a 'great' Hokage she'd think you'd make—and bam! *You've got a brand. new. hat.*"

Kakashi could think of nothing worse. "She's my student, you ass."

His friend had the audacity to choke on a strangled laugh. "Yeah, well...we *all* knew you were a fucking pervert, Kakashi. It just took you a few years to get to it so publicly."

He lifted his head to glare at the bastard, as his companion just laughed at him. He could hear a violent pulse in his ears.

"I'm telling you: you're wrong. There's no way."

"No...No, I don't think I am." He gloated. "Forget my left testicle—who wants that anyway?—I bet your cheap ass one month's pay that fifteen years from now, I'll be right."

"Genma..." His irritation was growing...

"I want interest too. Fifteen years of interest adds up—"

"*Genma*," Kakashi spit out. "Stop."

"—maybe I should tell her about this bet so she can remind you as soon as she gets home."

"Do you *not fucking* listen?" Anger was bubbling in his stomach.

"—and if you're Hokage? One month's pay is a *small fortune*—"

“Genma.” Rising. Blood rushing in his ears...

“—I know exactly what I’m going to spend it on too: *senbon* . Ridiculously expensive *senbon*—”

“*Genma—Fucking. stop.*”

His chakra flared.

...and the room stopped.

The merry tune the drunk jonin were singing died off in a sudden hush.

The bartender dropped a bottle of whiskey with shaky fingers.

An old man who was drinking by himself a little way down the bar laid himself against the wall like he could camouflage into it.

A few chunin in the corner froze like a frightened animal and slowly backpedaled their way to the nearest door.

Genma had his back straight, and feet planted on the ground. His eyes were wide and alert. A hand was inching towards his kunai in his pouch. Face wiped of any humor, and sweat forming on his brow.

...Everyone in the room went still.

Except, of course—

Sakura.

She stood up almost as soon as he felt his chakra release. And when the others locked up in a wary stillness.

She—

She moved towards him.

But he didn’t want to think about that.

(Or what that could mean.)

Kakashi was done. Done with Genma’s taunts. And Sakura’s mysteries. And his Future-Self’s problems.

Done with this whole damn day. This whole situation.

He already let his emotions get the best of him. Like a child.

An Angry. Jealous. Spoiled. *Child*.

He was *done*.

So, he placed what was left of the sake cup that was crumbling in his hand on the counter—

And walked out.

-

[image]

Chapter End Notes

FUN FACT: there was a mention of building mental walls and a giant bat...I may, or may not, have had Severus Snape on the mind.

LIFE UPDATE: I am moving back to Japan next week! Yay!

What does that mean for you?: I will still be updating on *my* Friday or Saturday. But because I'm moving halfway across the world, that may mean vastly different times for all of you. I'm not dead. I'm not going to stop updating. Just time zone shenanigans lol.

Unless everything goes terribly wrong (or I die from stress ☹). I'll see ya'll next week!

I am your Lover

Chapter Notes

Ya'll...this is it. 🤖 Please keep all hands, arms, and legs inside the vehicle at all times. There may be sudden drops, stops, and loop-de-loops. Here comes the ride.

Disclaimer: I do not own Naruto or *any* Naruto media.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

[image]



[image]

Chapter 7: I am your Lover

She felt his chakra flare before she saw his face.

He wasn't facing her. She couldn't see his single eye. But his back was forcibly languid. His posture was equal parts relaxed but very very tense. His signature laziness.

And his chakra—well, his chakra was out for blood.

Swallowing the room and everyone in it. Suffocating. Volatile. Vicious.

And everyone just sort of—stopped. Like time went still. And they were all waiting for a bomb to detonate.

So, she rose to her feet with her eyes on him like she was cornering a deadly animal. Half stumbling as she tried to burn the alcohol off as fast as she's ever attempted before.

Just to see what in *hell* Genma did that she had to go fix.

She only made it halfway across the room before she heard the distinct sound of cracked glass being dropped on the counter as he turned towards her.

Well, not *her* exactly. But the exit.

And—*Oh no*.

His face was blank—nothing but a sort of dead, vacant stare ahead. His jaw locked all the way from mandible to clavicle in a sharp rigid angle that strained under his mask.

He didn't look at her.

In fact, he walked right past her.

His footsteps made no sound. And the only reason everyone in the room knew he was gone, was because the door squeaked on his way out.

Sakura took one look at the broken sake cup and Genma's pale blood drained face—

—and she ran.

She burst through the door just as she heard Kurenai yell across the room to Genma—

"What. did you. do?!"

Sakura caught sight of him in her peripheral vision just as he was jumping up onto a rooftop across the street from the bar. She slammed her hands together and flooded her system with chakra.

She shushinned right in front of him.

"Kakashi, what—"

He vanished into leaves. *Oh, hell.*

She looked around for his shushin, and expanded her chakra to her

senses. Maybe if she—

She caught his silver hair half a mile down the road. Interlocking her fingers without a second thought, she shushinned a little ahead of him.

“Wait, please—” He shushinned across the road and took off at full speed.

He was running. Running away from *her*.

Damn it, Kakashi.

So, she shushinned right after him.

Popping into existence just a few feet ahead of him before he would vanish again before she could even get words out.

On roofs. In the middle of crowded streets. On top of a telephone pole.

Over and over again—across half of Konoha. Pink and silver blurs at war.

And *damn him*—because he *knew* short range shushin like this was a colossal *drain* on her chakra. And what a *waste*.

And he was getting sneakier and sneakier to try to lose her. Even shushinning inside shops and restaurants.

By this point she was just going to go in to find him, punch him in face, and pin his ass to the ground—

...but when she rematerialized this time—

All was still.

No flash movement in the corner of her eye. No poof of smoke or leaves of another shushin.

Sakura suddenly realized they were on the roof of his apartment building.

And he was standing above her with his hands shoved in his pockets, on top of the barrier wall glaring down at her with a vengeance.

At some point during their shushin battle, he must have pushed up his headband. Because *two* eyes—one black as night, and another glowing

red and swirling—were scowling at her.

Rage was rippling off him like waves.

But that's okay. She was mad too.

"Are you ready to talk now, *Ka-ka-shi*?"

~~~~~ かかし ~~~~~

Kakashi stared down at Sakura. She did not look happy with him. Good.

"You couldn't wait for *five seconds* so we could *talk*—"

He interrupted her. "Talk about *what*, Sakura?"

"Well, I don't know—but Genma *obviously* said *something*, or you wouldn't have tried to kill him."

The Copy-nin tried his best not to flinch at her wording.

***...everyone here thinks of you as a friend.***

***Friend-killer-Kakashi.***

"I didn't try to kill *anyone*," he bit out with suppressed venom.

"No, but you were *thinking* about it." She scoffed while crossing her arms over her chest with distinct ire and a sneer. "*So, what was it?* What got you so *upset* that—"

"*Nothing*—it wasn't important."

Her eyes narrowed. "Obviously, it was."

"No." His hand tightened in his pockets. "It was *nothing*."

"Come on, Kakashi—*use your words*." She snarled up at him. Emerald eyes flaring at him with a mocking tone. "It's like I always tell my son—'you have to be a big boy and *talk* about what's bothering you'. Are

you going to be a *big boy*, Kakashi? *Hm?* Or are we preferring to act like a *child* today?"

*I have two right now—a daughter and a son. We were planning to try for baby number three soon—*

"I don't *want* to talk. And don't—don't bring your kids into this."

Her chin snapped up in a defiant thrust. "*Why not?* What's wrong with my kids? All I wanted was just to see if you were okay. But *no—*"

"Sakura..." *Fuck. Please stop.*

Obito's eye was throbbing now.

"—you just kept running away! For *no* reason—"

"*Sakura.*" His voice didn't even sound like his own anymore—far too much like a wounded animal—somewhere between a whine and a growl.

"—what could have *possibly* been said to you, to make you act like that?"

His chakra flared without his consent again. He rematerialized in a swirl of leaves right in front of her.

Emerald met his own mismatched eyes.

"*You want to know—?*" He bared his teeth at her beneath his mask as his hand shot up towards her jaw.

She was so small that his hand engulfed half her throat and mouth. He forced her offending mouth shut and pulled her chin towards his own face in a violent jerk. His grip was tight but not enough to bruise or restrict air.

"*Who is your husband, Sakura?*"

The words floated in the air between them—weightless and heavy at the same time.

Then the haze disappeared, and regret flooded his veins as his stomach plummeted in disgust.

*What was he doing? He hoped he didn't hurt her. Scare her. He didn't mean to—*

But his rough panting nearly stalled when he finally noticed the look on her face.

The jade of her eyes was a slim, nonexistent rim around her blown pupils. Large, swollen, and shiny—pupils so dilated they were the size of small coins.

Her lips were parted in a sort of mix between that of involuntary surprise and a pleasurable sigh, that made his head tilt in curiosity. His eyes shifted from her dark eyes to her mouth in intense interest.

Back and forth. Each point of interest making his pulse race a little faster.

Her hand reached up to wrap around his. Their fingers entwined at her throat...

She trembled a bit beneath his touch—a rational part of his mind thought maybe it was fear. Or anger.

But a pleased snide little monster in the corner of his brain laughed darkly.

It said: *You're fooling yourself.*

...and her hand squeezed over his and made his own tighten around her throat. Her eyelashes fluttered. She licked her lips.

And—*Oh.*

*Fuck. Fuckfuckfuck—*

He understood her now. What she was saying about never wanting someone more than in that moment.

He wanted—and *wanted*. Want. Will want. Past, present, and future. All at once.

He wanted to devour her with his mouth. And burn every touch into his skin. He wanted to meld her scent into his own. And hear her voice every single day for the rest of his life.

He wanted to live with her. He wanted to die with her.

The dark little monster preened: *Look at this beautiful creature. She was made for you.*

The rational part of his brain's rapport: *I just hope I was made for her too.*

He caved. And leaned in; ready to rip his mask down and taste her. Mark her. Claim her.

But...

She shifted and pulled away—just out his reach.

The absence of her touch made his sight blur white—he was filled with such malcontent and an overwhelming sense of loss. Where there was once her warmth, was now just empty air.

His mind went blank. He squeezed his eyes shut for a moment and when he finally reopened them, he trailed her movement as she shifted a few steps back.

A coy little smile played on her lips. Her pupils were still blown and watching him like a cat.

"My husband?" she questioned airily. Her voice was titled with amusement. And a secret. His body reacted to the sound with a stirring between his legs.

He blinked slowly. Lazily. His own dilated eyes followed her eagerly. He stepped forward towards her compulsively.

"*What's your name, Sakura?*" The question rolled off his tongue like honey. Slow and dripping.

She smiled like a predator as she stepped back again. And clicked her tongue in a faux chastise. "Haven't we already been over this? Or do you *still* not believe me? I'm Haruno Sakura."

He huffed out an indignant puff of air. And took another step towards her. "Yes. But I think you may have another."

She cocked her head and brought her hand to her chin in an exuberant show of thought.

"You're *right*..." she flashed her teeth and leaned forward with a sneering smirk. The words sounded bitter and cruel on her tongue. "Haruno Sakura married and took her husband's family name. She became...*Uchiha* Sakura."

Everything in his body felt wrong. Like suddenly every vertebra was

unexpectedly unaligned. A fictitious hole formed right behind his eyes, like a gaping chasm had established itself in his brain.

Kakashi felt something groan, creak, and then finally crack within him. Whatever it was that was last holding his hopes together finally broke off and shattered.

His vision blurred around the edges. He squeezed his eyes shut.

*Fuck.*

Part of him couldn't comprehend his folly. The other whispered '*I told you so*' in his ear.

From there, he internally spiraled into a squall of equal parts self-reprimanding and despair. Because of course—*of course*—she didn't belong to him. How could she? How dare he *hope*—

His tongue swelled into a clot of sandpaper in his mouth. He was afraid to swallow; suddenly afraid he'd choke on his own tongue and ego.

He was *drowning*.

Kakashi didn't know how long it took to reorientate himself. By the time he noticed the silence, it could have been seconds or minutes at this point. When he was able, he slid his eyes up to finally look at her. It was painful and slow—filled with reluctance and embarrassment.

And there she was—*watching* him.

With huge feline eyes and her lips slitted in a bitter smile that was as tight and as sharp as a knife. She was watching him with the utmost interest—like she set him on fire and was watching him burn.

She stepped towards him then, and he felt the sudden need to step back—they were moving around each other like magnets—attracting then repelling.

But her eyes were still glittering at him as if she couldn't look away.

“At nineteen, *Haruno* Sakura married her childhood crush and became *Uchiha* Sakura,” she repeated as if he didn't hear it the first time. “It was her dream wedding. Her dream groom. So naturally at twenty, she gave birth to her first child—a daughter, *Uchiha* Sarada.”

He nodded absently and took a step back. He cleared his throat, but it

didn't do much to help the sound of his voice.

"*I see*. Of course..." he choked out.

She followed after him with another step.

"But she was anxious, and eager—*so ridiculously impatient*—to have what she thought was her 'fairytale ending' that she—" a frustrated sigh. "She didn't properly talk with her husband. She had expectations of their marriage; and *he*—well, he had his own."

"So she gave birth alone—well, not really, but she *felt* alone—and afraid. And the first time her daughter was placed in her arms she made a decision. Some would say it was rash, others would say she was distressed from giving birth—but she *knew*. I mean like a cord had snapped, she *knew*—right then and there—that she was done. It was over. And if she didn't change her life *now*...then she never would."

She blew out a nervous breath as she cocked her head a little and leaned a little closer towards him. Her feet shuffled like she was debating stepping into his space again, but something was holding her back.

"So, she ended the marriage the same week as her child's birth. And *Uchiha* Sakura, became *Haruno* Sakura once more."

Kakashi stood very still. Maybe the most still he had ever gone—in fact, if it wasn't for the sound of his heartbeat pounding in his ears, he might have even thought his heart had stopped.

"And—" she trembled a little and started chewing on her lip, before huffing like a child and straightening her spine to her full height. Her eyes, however, were nervously anywhere but on him now. "And—*and*—well, after a few years...she fell in love. And she married who she probably should have married all along, if she wasn't so dense."

She swallowed noticeably; eyes now trained on the ground. "So, then *Haruno* Sakura, took her new husband's name and became *Hata*—"

Kakashi moved. It could have been a shushin for all he knew as it was so desperate and fast, that he just seemed to materialize in front of her.

He *needed*—he needed to stop her.

So, he moved his hand on her jaw again in a soft, wretched kind of

plea for her to be quiet, stalling the name from tumbling out.

Her eyes were shining and wide—unusherred tears were building up in the corner. She let out a sort of pained cry like a wounded animal.

“You’re upset—of course, you are. I’m sure it’s disappointing—” she stumbled the words out. “It’s a disappointing future, I’m sure. I mean you *hate* me, right now. How could you even think about *marrying*—”

Kakashi let out a growl that faded off lamely into the sound of a dying whimper. His head was swimming violently.

“I’m sure you wanted someone *else*—maybe someone prettier. Someone your own age, or at least someone you didn’t *hate*—” she was rambling now in a hysterical flood of words.

The molasses-like pit of his brain thought: *What is she saying?*

Until her words and meaning fell into place like a knife in his heart.

*Oh. She thinks—she thinks I wouldn’t want her.*

“I-I was going to tell you—I *should* have told you as soon you started to trust me—”

*What? How...*

“I’m sorry, Kakashi—I’m so so sorry. I was just so *scared*—” she whimpered.

*Oh, fuck. In what world, should she be apologizing to me—*

“There was *no way* you would have believed me. I just didn’t know what to say. ‘Hello, I’m Hatake Sakura. Your future wi—’ ”

An electric spark rippled through him so suddenly that he was almost afraid he unconsciously activated his chidori. His grip tightened on her on her jaw.

“*Don’t.*” He barked out. “Don’t say you’re mine—” His mind was overloaded, his words stalled. “—or *I swear Sakura, I’ll never fucking let you go again.*”

The words themselves came out as a snarl, but underneath it was a type of panic that felt intimate and visceral.

No, he thought. *Don’t let me believe I could have it all...*

His hand slipped limply to his side, and shuttered his eyes tight shut again.

Everything he *could* have. Things he never knew he wanted. It was all at his fingertips—and he was scared...

But—

But something soft and warm was weaving itself around his fingers.

*"Hatake Kakashi."* she said softly. Fondly. "If you *ever* let me go, I will hunt you down and murder you myself."

He felt her warmth move into his space. A light brushing of her lip against his masked cheek. He thought he might break at the touch.

"Don't *ever* let me go, Kakashi." She sighed against his cheek. "I expect you to hold on and on *and on* ...every day of your life. And if you die one day and leave me, I expect your ghost to be whispering in my ear." He heard the smile in her voice. A vow. "And I'll do the same for you."

He stared at her. His eyes tracing the curve of her cheek; the shape of lips; the emotion in her eyes.

For the first time in his life—he wouldn't mind having a ghost follow him around if it was her.

He let out a sigh—a very fatigued and resolute exhale. Like he was resigned to his fate. She leaned back and met his weary eyes and chuckled lightly under her breath. Stepping back a little further, she scanned his expression thoroughly.

"You're..." she started hesitantly, "...you're not disappointed, then?"

He had half a mind to glare at her for saying the words, but he was slightly delirious and had no idea what he was doing.

Instead, he bent down and knocked his forehead into hers. A gentle, yet chastising head-butt. She didn't even flinch. She just rubbed the spot on her forehead, like that was a completely normal thing between them.

"I just thought...it would sound like a nightmare to you without the history and context. I come with a lot of baggage, after all." She bit her lip but was starting to smile. "A child that's not of your blood—



although let me be clear: she is very much your daughter in every other way. And an ex-husband that is very much still part of our lives. I've had a few complaints about my temper—not to mention my brute strength. A work life balance problem—*probably*. Not a very good cook either.”

Her smile was growing little by little.

“Did I mention the *eight* dogs?” she snorted. “The house is constantly loud and noisy and the *dog hair*—”

“Sakura.”

“What—? I just want you to understand. It's not what you probably envisioned for yourself—not what you wanted.”

Kakashi wondered if he hit her harder on the head with his, if it would somehow transfer on a cellular level.

“What could *possibly* make you think I wouldn't want you?”

It was silent for a moment. Her smile grew impossibly wider.

“*Oh, no.*” Her breathless blissful tone didn't match her words. “You're even starting to sound like him.”

He was startled that the statement didn't seem to scare him so much anymore. He chuckled lightly.

“I *am* him.”

“Yes,” she blinked up at him owlishly. “I think you are.”

They were still standing close to each other—but he stepped in a little more. He tilted her face up to look at him, and the long stretch of her neck underneath his fingertips made his abdomen coil. His chest grazed her own, and he wondered if she could feel just how much he wanted her when his hip brushed hers.

The Copy-nin swallowed thickly but he was surprisingly not nervous. Eager, maybe.

He reached up—and tugged a finger under the lip of his mask.

He slid it down for her.

She let out a bark of a laugh with a huff following right behind it. And

he suddenly felt cool fingers sliding against his unprotected skin. She was holding his face in her hands.

“Oh, *you...*” her wide shiny eyes were staring at him in wonder. “You *absolute* bastard. *Fifteen years*—and you’ve barely aged a day.”

It was so shocking to him that this was the first thing she’d say after revealing his face, that he couldn’t help but laugh too.

“Sounds like good news then—” he grinned, and her eyes flickered like they were taking a photograph. And her breath hitched involuntarily—It made him smile even wider. “I wouldn’t want anyone thinking you were married to an *old* man.”

She gave her head a little shake and then proceeded to pout like a petulant child. He was not shocked that he seemed to find this endearing.

“*It’s not fair*—! Besides a few lines around the eyes, you look the *exact* same.” Her eyes narrowed dangerously. “We’re going to have a chat about your nightly skin routine when I get back, because I’m inclined to think you’ve been holding out on me.”

“You’ll absolutely be disappointed, but I’m looking forward to it.”

She let out another huff, but jade eyes kept darting around his face in awe. Slim fingers were trailing along his skin as she traced his temples, his cheekbones, his jaw, the mole on his chin, and lastly—the edge of his lips.

“Kakashi—” she mumbled while licking her lips. His eyes glued themselves to the movement. “—would it be rather rude if I kissed you? I’ve just—I’ve missed you so much. And—and this week being near you, but not—you know, *near* you—has been very *very* trying.”

He leaned down half a foot to lessen the gap to her lips. She instantly shut up.

“You think I’d object?” He was obscenely close now. His lips almost brushing against her own.

“I think...” she stumbled like her mind lost track of the thought. “...I think you’re not obligated to do any—” a swallow. “—any *husbandly* duties since it hasn’t happened for you yet.”

He could have laughed. Instead, he rested his forehead on hers.

Looming over her.

“*Sakura.*” The ridiculous, silly woman. “I’d happily be ‘*obligated*’—I’d make it my life’s mission if you want—to kiss you every day for the rest of our lives. Starting right now.”

She smiled and he felt it against his lips.

“If it starts right now—does that mean when I get back—I get fifteen years of makeup kisses?”

“*Deal.* Best fucking deal of my *life*—” Apparently her patience finally ran out.

Kissing Sakura was like being reunited with a lost limb. Or like the eye that he had lost on Kannabi Bridge, was suddenly and inexplicably, back in his head.

He had been with other women here and there—only when he was wandering around as Sukea and no one knew *who* he was. He had kissed others.

But they had always been hesitant, questioning things.

As an inexperienced kid, thoughts popped up behind his eyelids: *am I doing this right? Do I like this woman? Do I like the way she feels? The way she kisses?*

As an adult and shinobi, the tone shifted: *is she reaching for a kunai? Do I taste poison? Is the room secure? Where’s the fastest exit point if this goes sideways?*

For Sakura though, there were no questions.

Just her lips and his. Her breathing and his. Her tongue—and taste—and the feel of teeth lightly biting his lip—and his his his. *His.* She was his.

She slotted herself back into his skull like that missing eye.

She was his, and he was hers.

She kissed him like she owned him—like his name was written on her lips, and she was just doing the polite thing—and returning the lost item back to him.

She was much shorter—so she yanked him down by the collar of his

vest—and leveled the playing field. It made him smile even if his back was protesting in strain.

Sakura had many different kisses; some that Kakashi had never experienced before—

She devoured him one moment—lips firmly meeting his own, and tongue curling around his—and then the next she would suddenly back off with an innocent peck. She'd leave a small trail of butterfly kisses along the corner of his mouth and jaw, before deciding it obviously wasn't enough—and went back to her unfinished meal of tongue and teeth.

He found that he liked all her kisses. In fact, he was growing more and more fond of it by the second.

And when his back finally gave out, and he went to straighten himself to get some sort of relief—he crept a hand behind her neck, and made sure her mouth came with him. She followed without protest (she obviously had done this before, it seemed) and hiked herself up his chest.

He couldn't help but grin as he felt her legs lock around his ribs and her arms wrap around his neck. She was sitting taller than him now, perching on his arms as he supported her, and he had to crane his neck up not break the kiss—but *his back*. His back thanked him profusely.

She was smiling against his lips as her pink bangs fell around their faces.

“Better?” she mumbled as she pecked that mole on his chin again and ran her fingers through his hair.

“The *best*,” he sighed as he dove back into her mouth for a few more seconds. “Why didn't we start like this?”

She laughed as she nipped his bottom lip. “Because I thought it would be rude if I climbed you like a tree on our first go.”

He pecked her on the lips in a lingering sort of way that he had never done with anyone before. The very first of its kind.

“I think I would have adapted alright. But next time, I'll get you a step stool.”

She huffed out a laugh as he buried his face in her neck. The smell of strawberries and jasmine invading his senses. His nose picked up something else too—something subtle and heady.

Female arousal.

His mouth watered and he held back a groan.

“*Sakura.*” He splayed his hands along the thighs wrapped around his torso. He trailed them slowly along the black fabric of her thighs, until they met their targets. He squeezed her ass firmly. She giggled. The smell grew a little stronger. “How mad do you think my Future-self would be if I brought you to bed right now?”

Sakura pulled back enough to see his face, her fingers still playing with his hair and raking his scalp.

Fuck, he liked that.

She grinned coyly, “Well, that depends.”

She tapped his shoulder, and he released his arms as he allowed her to slide down to her feet. “Are we just sleeping in said bed? Or are we—”

He wasn’t sure what possessed him to do it. Surely, it would be incredibly rude if it was anyone else, but he figured I can’t have been the first time he’d done it to her.

He grabbed her pretty little hand, and placed it right on top of his cock. It was at full attention for her and jumped happily at the contact. Blown pupils wandered to where her hand was, as they grew impossibly wider with want.

“*Oh.*” she breathed out. Her eyes were fond; her smile was positively lecherous. “Well, not much for sleeping then.”

She chewed on her lip and he tried not to laugh. She cupped him through the fabric—just a little squeeze—before she backed away abruptly and cleared her throat.

“*Mad,*” she choked out like it pained her to say. “You’ll be mad. Because you’re a ridiculously competitive idiot—even with *yourself*. Which is just—and I’d have to hear you whine and grumble about comparing—and even if I wanted too—and believe me, *I want too—*”

He took two steps into her space. He gently lifted her chin up again,

but this time, he skimmed past her lips and inhaled at her neck again. A deep resonating breath before he licked the stripe of skin right where her pulse jumped.

He grazed it again with his lips. It was a sensitive spot for all shinobi—especially ANBU. A weak point in the human body.

And then because he's insane. And delirious. And a little bit high off the smell of her—

He opened his mouth and put her jugular in his jaws. His canines poised to pierce.

She didn't flinch.

Instead, she let out a warbled groan that died somewhere in her throat—right under his teeth.

He wanted her—*fuck, did he want her*. But—

"You're right," he said against her throat. He pulled back to straighten up, but he cradled her face in his palms. His thumb stroked from jaw to neck. "I'd hate it. There's some version of me, waiting for you to come home. To me. And our family. Probably worried sick—maybe his hair is even growing greyer by the second." She scoffed, but her jade eyes sparkled at him. "And I'd honestly hate having you in my bed while knowing that."

She blinked up at him for a moment, and then she lifted up on her tiptoes and pecked him on the lips again. He liked the pecks. The pecks might be his new favorite thing.

"I'm glad you agree," Sakura beamed up at him. "I'll make it up to you as soon as I get home."

"Yes. Fucking yes."

She laughed. "Between this and the fifteen years of make-up kisses, we might not be leaving the house anytime soon..."

"Sounds like ideal timing—baby number three will be here in no time."

"Yes, well, you always were *efficient*." He loved the salacious smirk on her face.

She kissed him again with a little smile hidden on the corner of her

lips.

A sort of slow, adoring thing that made his insides melt. Like whispering ‘*good morning*’ after a night beside him. Or ‘*welcome back*’ after a long mission.

*Ohayo—*

*Tadaima.*

*Okaeri—*

A kiss of homecoming.

A kiss—Kakashi thought vaguely—of a wife kissing her husband.

~~~~~ かかし ~~~~~

He did end up having Sakura in his bed. Sort of.

She led him back to his apartment like a puppy on a leash. Just the pinch of her fingers on his sleeve, a small tug, and he followed her blindly. Probably anywhere, if he was being honest.

They showered (separately, to his dismay) and dressed for bed, quickly and quietly. And when it was all done, he sat her down and started to ask questions—*real* questions. Things that had piled up in the corner of his mind that he was finally brave enough to know.

Some of them she answered. Some of them she said were too revealing for him to know.

(*Spoilers*, she said.)

She was patient and kind. Quiet on some subjects—loud on others.

But she answered everything pertaining to *them*.

He found out about her prior marriage to Sasuke. And then how they came to be. He asked about when they first started courting. The reaction to it. Their life. Their family.

He asked about his adopted daughter—*Uchiha Sarada*.

How he had helped raise her from birth, as she wouldn't know her own biological father until years later. With her black hair and eyes, she physically took little from Sakura when it came to looks. But her personality was all Sakura.

At six years old, she loved to read. Her favorite color was red. She had trouble with target practice. Frozen grapes were her favorite dessert. Hated garlic. She was kind and smart and caring, but a little bit of a know-it-all *and*—

The very best older sister.

And he asked about his son. *Hatake Saki*—written as 'A blossom in a field'. Or hope.

When he balked a little at the feminine name, she laughed. But she insisted it was important to her. She wanted to honor just a little of the Haruno family's tradition. And after all, what was more natural than a field and flowers?

She talked about him. *Their* son.

With his dusty blush-colored hair that was darker and duller than hers—a perfect mix of their grey and bubblegum pink. And his charcoal eyes that looked just like his father. And at almost two years old, he was already showing a difficult personality and the intelligence to back it up. A trait that he probably received from both of them.

He wouldn't eat eggplant, even if his father begged him. He loved baths, and his favorite thing was jumping in puddles after it rained. He was learning his letters just fine but hated nursery songs. He slept throughout the night but only if one of the ninken were with him.

He loved his big sister.

She talked and talked and talked into the early hours of the night. Talking about their life. Like it wasn't some dream in the far off distance.

At some point, Sakura bundled herself up in a cocoon of his green shuriken blanket and fell asleep. He stayed awake a little longer, staring at the ceiling, before wrapping himself around her with his touch starved body.

He dozed in and out that night.

Nightmares might have come and gone. He didn't know.

There was a warmth in his arms. The sound of soft snores in his ears. And the smell of her hair on his pillow.

They must have chased everything else away.

But he would wake every once in a while, to make sure she was still there. And he'd stare at the curve of her hip or the faded freckles on her shoulder.

He was memorizing every detail—every ounce of knowledge he had gained about her. Them.

He hoped his Sharingan was up to the task.

Maybe he could sear her in the back of his brain—an unconscious thought that would not be forgotten.

Even if he did lose this memory—he hoped his mind still found her. A familiar flash of pink in the corner of his eye. A dream of a woman he didn't know.

He would fall asleep that night next to a woman that would become his family, and the names: *Sakura*, *Sarada* and *Saki* echoing in his head.

He wasn't ready to forget.

~~~~~ さくら ~~~~~

Sakura knew this smell—green tea and old books.

She knew these arms. And the feeling of him wrapped around her as he snuggled into her back. She even knew the feel of this outrageous green blanket (although it felt much newer).

She felt warm and safe—and something absolutely *wonderful* was rubbing up against her bum. Something thick, long, and hard—something she wanted to grind up against.

And maybe she would have.

...If she didn't peek open one eye—

To find Pakkun staring at her, only inches away from her face.

A silent yelp died in her throat.

“Boss-Lady.” Pakkun panted with very little concern for her shock. “I just wanted to let you know—we are all very happy to have you join the family.” A couple of lazy blinks focused on her from a few of the other dogs in the room. “Several of us have been waiting *years* for the Boss to finally give us some young pups to raise.” The pug leaned forward and planted a wet lick on her cheek. “*Welcome to the pack, Boss-Lady!*”

Multiple dogs panted happily, as their tails wagged in approval of their leader's statement. Sakura blinked at the dog. Talk about déjà vu. She suddenly felt like she joined the mafia—the canine-mafia. Again.

“Thank you...?” she scrambled.

Behind her, she noticed Kakashi bury his face into the back of her head as his shoulders shook with silent laughter. She elbowed him in the ribs.

“As much as I'm sure you want the mating to begin,” Sakura did not in fact, want the mating to begin with eight pairs of eyes on them. But she didn't interrupt the pug. “I thought I should let you know that two unusual scents are coming this way.”

Seven dogs turned towards the door (Pakkun still continued to stare at Sakura).

A clang of metal and loud footsteps echoed up the staircase outside the apartment door. Behind it followed voices she would know anywhere.

“Naruto, *you idiot*—you're supposed to be a ninja. Stop making so much noise!”

“*Shut up, teme!* You're the one yelling now,” a man whispered loudly. “Besides, I'm trying to concentrate. Her chakra is somewhere here.”

Kakashi froze behind her—stiff as a board.

“Maybe your stupid ‘sage-mode’ got it wrong.”

“*Please*. If you hadn’t lost her in the first place, we wouldn’t have to do this to begin with.”

An angry scoff. “What is she even doing here? Have you been here before?”

“Nah, doesn’t look familiar...but I can definitely feel her somewhere on this floor.”

There was a moment of silence—Sakura *knew* this silence. One of them was going to do something stupid. She scrambled out of the bed in a scurry towards the door.

“Do we knock on every door?” the angry man asked with very little patience.

“Forget that. *SAKURA-CHAN, GET YOUR ASS OUT HERE—!*” The loud man screamed.

Sakura flung the door open.

“*Damn it, Naruto!* It’s barely dawn and you’re going to wake the entire building. Don’t you have any respect—” she whisper-shouted.

“Sakura-chan! *See?* She can’t resist yelling at us.” The blond man rushed up to her and buried her in a hug. She pinched his side.

“You’re an idiot.” she said affectionately into his shoulder. “If you stopped doing stupid things—I’d stop yelling at you.”

He grinned a bright fox-like smile. “Why would I do that? You yelling is the favorite part of my day.”

The man behind him scoffed. She released Naruto and slunk around him to hug her ex-husband. He gave her a stiff one-handed hug that she knew was more affectionate than it seemed.

“Sasuke.” She sighed, “Thank you for coming for me.”

The Uchiha grunted, like that was somehow an acceptable reply.

“Why are you here, anyway?” Naruto asked with brilliant blue eyes.

“I don’t know? Ask Sasuke! I just fell out of the sky to find out I was *fifteen years—*”

“No, not here. But *here*. This ratty old apartment build—”

The metal door behind them creaked open. Kakashi stood leaning across the door, his arms crossed at his chest and his expression blank. Not that they would know, since his mask and headband were back in place. (How did the man get dressed so fast?)

Silence filled the group awkwardly.

“Well, that explains it.” Sasuke deadpanned. “Of course, *he’s* here.”

Sakura felt her cheeks flush. She suddenly realized how very little she was wearing in only Kakashi's undershirt.

“*Sakura!*” Naruto whispered agitatedly. “Why didn’t you say someone else was here? I would have been more, yah know, *incognito*...”

Sasuke laughed darkly in response to his blonde friend, but his eyes narrowed on Kakashi. “Look at you, Naruto. Using the big words. I didn’t think ‘*incognito*’ was part of your vocabulary.”

“*Shut up*, you bastard—! ”

Sakura stepped between them with a warning palm bearing down on each of their chests.

“It's *fine*.” She bit out and tried to start again calmly. “It's fine, he already knows who you are anyway. And about where I’m from. Well, he knows most of it—” she explained. She turned towards the door but refused to meet the Copy-nin’s eye. “Kakashi... meet my Naruto and Sasuke.”

Kakashi didn’t move for a second. Instead, he just looked them over, and all the men were suddenly sizing each other up. Sakura rolled her eyes. Finally, he gave a lazy two-fingered salute.

“Yo.”

Sasuke narrowed his eyes further as he tsked violently. “*Great*. Good to know our Jonin-sensei had a thing for you since we were eleven.”

“*Sasuke!*” She was blushing now. Probably as red as a tomato.

“Don’t ‘*Sasuke*’ me.” He mimicked her voice with a shrill falsetto. Sakura did not like it. He was in a mood. “We thought you might be locked up in a cell somewhere, and *where* do we find you?”

“—alright, Sasuke. Calm it down.” Bless Naruto. The Great Mediator.

*“Cuddled up with the pervert.”*

Sakura felt her eyes twitch. Naruto’s lips sort of puckered in distaste. Kakashi suddenly looked very very tired.

“...for fuck’s sake.” She heard Kakashi mumble under his breath. He turned and disappeared into the apartment.

*“Uchiha Sasuke.”* Sakura swallowed tightly. She deserved an award for restraint. “Just *shut up*—and get in the damn apartment before someone sees you.”

He didn’t move. Just stubbornly glared at her with his arms crossed haughtily. Naruto shifted nervously on his feet.

She crowded into his space. His Rinnegan peaked behind his bangs in a cautious defense. His eyes narrowed at her. She did not budge.

“Get. Inside. And I’ll *explain*.” She forced out through gritted teeth.

There was a moment of just heavy glares. Naruto was probably sweating at this point.

Finally—*finally*—he gave. And with a scoff and shoulder-check (*very mature, Sasuke*) he rounded her and stepped into the apartment. Naruto followed along behind him.

And Sakura—

Sakura was wondering why she was surrounded by such troublesome men.

She made her way into the small apartment to see that the ninkin had disappeared. She was left with Naruto sprawled out on the couch, hands clasped behind his head and grin in place. Sasuke perched grumpily on the arm rest next to him like an angry toddler.

And Kakashi—*poor Kakashi*—was leaning against the back wall with hands stuffed in his pockets, and his face up towards the ceiling like he was praying to whatever gods he worshiped to give him strength.

“Okaaaay,” she puffed out the word just to feel the air leave her lungs. “*Okay.*” she said more resolutely.

“You two—*sit*. And wait, while I get dressed.” She turned a pleading

stare to Kakashi. “And you—just—try and play nice until I get back. Give me a minute.”

Sasuke scoffed. Naruto gave her a dorky thumbs up. Kakashi looked like he was begging her not to leave him alone with the two idiots.

She bolted for her clothes and slammed the bathroom door just as she heard Naruto say, “*Soooo*, how’s life?”

Sweet Naruto. As if, Kakashi would willingly engage in small talk.

She scrambled as she undressed. She brushed her teeth while sliding her ANBU pants on and hastily braided her hair while simultaneously slipping her shirt over her head. She was as fast as humanly possible (even Kakashi had to be impressed).

By the time Sakura tumbled out back in the room after literal seconds—it was uncomfortably quiet.

Naruto was whistling quietly to himself while bouncing his knee nervously. Sasuke was squeezing the hilt of his katana while casting a glare at Kakashi. The Copy-nin was staring at the ceiling again, but now he had a kunai twirling on his finger, in a subtle threat.

She held back a groan.

“*Lovely*. Thanks for waiting, boys.”

Kakashi visibly shuddered as soon as the word “boys” was vocalized. She ignored him.

“Now—what were we discussing?”

“You were explaining—” Naruto jumped in helpfully.

“*The pervert*. You were explaining the pervert.”

Sakura narrowed her eyes on Sasuke.

“To answer Sasuke’s ‘*concern*’—” she spat that word out. Whoops. “Kakashi knows the gist of the situation. But he hasn’t been sitting on this knowledge for fifteen years, he’s going to forget it all.”

Sasuke twitched. Naruto swiveled around to face her. “*What!?* What do you mean he’ll forget? He’ll forget *all* of this? That we were here? That *you* were here for a week?”

“Yep. Remember that week between when we went to the Land of Waves and the Chuunin Exam—and no one knew where he was? I’m pretty sure that’s what this is.”

Naruto sputtered a bit. Sasuke frowned. Kakashi was rubbing his temples.

“But *how*?” Sasuke huffed.

“I’m not really sure. Sandaime found some obscure Yamanaka secret scroll. It will allow me to seal all the memories pertaining to me.” She glanced at Naruto. “When we get back, you really should take a look in that storage closet where you found the *Kage no Bushin* scroll.” She explained flatly. “Kami knows, what else is in there.”

“So, he’ll just...*forget*?” Naruto was watching Kakashi now cautiously. “No harm done?”

“Yep. No harm done.” She sniffed, “Well, theoretically. I guess we’ll see when we get back.”

“And you’re okay with that, Kaka-sensei?” She tried not to notice the way Kakashi spasmed minutely at the affectionate name.

He shrugged, “She seems to think there is no other alternative.”

“There’s *not*.” She concluded primly.

“Good. At least he won’t be pining after her for years then.” Sasuke sneered. “Glad to know our marriage hadn’t been doomed from the start.”

Sakura sighed. Kakashi ignored the taunt. Naruto— “No, it was just doomed right *after* that.”

Sasuke bristled like a feathering duck. Naruto howled in laughter. Kakashi was staring longingly at the window.

“*Okay!* Grow up you two,” she snapped. “Naruto, how—how are the kids?” She swallowed lamely, “...And him?”

Naruto grinned brightly. Wow, she missed that grin.

“The kids are *fine*, Sakura-chan! They’re mostly at your parents. But Hinata helps when she can—even Ino is helping out every now and then.” He patted for her to sit down on the couch next to him. “Besides, Sarada is a no-nonsense kind of girl. She knows when

everyone is busy to help take care of her brother.”

Sakura couldn't help it. She pouted. “Excellent. Good to know my six year old doesn't really need me.”

Sasuke snorted. “She may not need you, but *that one* over there—” he shoved his thumb towards Kakashi abrasively. “He's having a meltdown.”

“You always did like the dramatic ones...” Naruto mumbled.

No one in the room decided to acknowledge that with a reply.

Kakashi was suddenly more interested in a book he pulled out of nowhere. Were his ears slightly pink? Yes. Yes, they were.

“I'm not surprised.” She desperately tried not to sound happy. “He's okay, though?”

“Yah, sure—I mean, if you consider the murderous threats, the sulking, and staring off into space constantly as ‘*okay*’. The paperwork is piling up and no one wants to question it. Kiba accidentally asked where you were—and he snapped a pencil like it was a broken neck.”

“Let's just say, everyone is giving him a wide berth. We had to send Sarada in with lunches, just to get him to eat,” Sasuke added grumpily.

“He would come if he could, Sakura-chan. You *know* he would—but he's stressed out and being Hokage doesn't help—”

There was a harsh snap—the distinct sound of a book being slammed shut by angry hands. And Kakashi's head whipped up towards them.

Sakura groaned and buried her face in her hands. “*Naruto!*”

Naruto sputtered for a second. “*You mean he doesn't know—?* How did you keep that a secret—How was I supposed to know you didn't tell him?!”

Sasuke chuckled darkly. He smirked at Kakashi evilly.

“*Congratulations, Kakashi. You get to wear a stupid hat and have your ridiculous masked face on a mountain side—forever.*”

The Copy-nin's head dropped back with a thud against the wall and a sting of ‘*fuck me, fuck me, fuck me*’s was spewing out of his lips in discontent.



She could smooth this over. "...Kakashi, it's not *that* bad—"

"Why is *he* not Hokage?" Kakashi interrupted her with an aggressive nod towards Naruto.

And Naruto—Blessed. *Good*.— Naruto.

He did what Sakura called '*The Smile*'. With a hand scratching unassumingly behind his head, and his eyes crinkled shut in a genuine grin. And his mouth split open in a golden smile as bright as the sun. It was a little bashful. A little self-deprecating like he felt he was somehow burdening others. But affectionate—and so so endearing.

It melted hearts—it saved lives—it changed the world.

"Because you told me not to. At least, not yet." Naruto's smile grew a little wider. "You wanted to give me time. Said, I should enjoy having a young family. That you didn't want me ending up like my Dad...so you covered for me for a few extra years."

Kakashi blinked at him for a second, and then sort of deflated at that—like a sad, tired balloon. He had no way to argue against it, and Sakura was pleased she didn't have to fight her way out of this revelation.

Kami, she loved Naruto sometimes.

"Besides, you're retiring soon, and I'll take over from there. And then *you* can enjoy your family—I'm sure in a few years there will be a whole new clan of pink haired little shinobi running around Konoha."

"I doubt that." Sasuke snorted, "He's an old man."

Naruto burst out laughing. "You only think that because you've never caught them two in the office going at it like rabbits—"

"*Naruto—!?!*" Nevermind, she *hated* Naruto. "*What the hell!*"

"It's not *my* fault you two don't know how to put up a silencing seal —"

Sasuke looked like he was going to puke. Sakura's face was on fire. Kakashi—what was Kakashi doing?

He crossed the room and placed a hand on Naruto's shoulder in absolute seriousness.

“Naruto, if I’m Hokage—does that mean Genma is still my ANBU guard?”

“Yah, sure. Why?”

Kakashi’s lone eye curved into such an absurd grin—it gleamed in perverse delight.

“The hat’s worth it.” He concluded while glancing towards Sakura. “I can’t wait to make his life a living hell.”

She promptly buried her hands in her face again. She hated all of them.

Naruto was scratching his cheek with his head tilted like a confused puppy. Sasuke was frowning with his eyes closed, looking like he wanted to be anywhere but here.

“*Okaaaaaay.*” She cleared her throat. Her cheeks were still hot. “Full conclusion—the future is great. The best. *Swell.* Let’s not mess it up.”

Sasuke had to scoff at this. Naruto gave another goofy thumbs up.

She stood and turned towards Kakashi, “Do you need to alert the Sandaime?”

He shrugged and stuffed his hands in his pockets while standing to his slouched height. “Already did. Pakkun should be on his way now.”

Ah, of course he did. Always the good little soldier. She should have known.

“Well, then let's go.” Sasuke stood with a frown and turned towards the door.

“Go? You mean—right now?”

“Well, yah Sakura-chan. We came. We got you. *Time to go.*” Naruto stood and followed behind Sasuke.

Sakura bit her lip. “Shouldn’t we wait for the Sandaime’s approval?”

Sasuke snorted. “Why? It's his problem, not ours. We have our own deranged Hokage we have to report too.”

“You can’t leave from here?” Kakashi asked in a bored tone.

Sasuke stared back at him stupidly.

“Ah, he doesn’t know anything about Kamui yet.” Sasuke clipped. “No. If I bring us back here, who knows what’s in this exact spot in the future. Could be someone else’s apartment or a brick wall. Some unexpected person. It’s safer to move to the open field where we came in.”

“Yah, we used field seven!” Naruto grinned. “Some things never change, ne?”

Sakura hesitated. She looked over at Kakashi. He was a solid slab of granite—unmoving and cold.

“I...I need a moment. You two, go ahead and I’ll meet you there.”

“...Sakura-chan,” Naruto’s blue cerulean eyes flickered over her. She knew that soft tone. He always did see through people. “It’s time to say goodbye. We need to go home.”

“I know, I know. I just...I just need a moment, okay?”

Sasuke snorted. He stared at her for a second—and opened his mouth like he was going to say something cruel but decided against it. With a tight jaw and huff of annoyance, he then turned abruptly towards the door and stormed out.

Naruto took a long moment gazing at her too. She met his eyes and wished she could convey all the things she was feeling. He grinned after a moment—but it was a twisted, brittle smile. Kind, but a little bit sad. Full of pity.

“See ya, Kaka-sensei.” He called out with a half-hearted wave. “Try and be nice to your three little genin, ne?”

The blonde didn’t wait for a reply. He turned and left to follow his teammate.

“I’ll do my best.” Kakashi answered to the closing door.

It slipped shut with a quiet *clank* and the room was filled with silence. Sakura took to staring at the floor. She traced a knot in the hardwood floor with her eyes over and over again.

She was desperately trying to organize her thoughts—there was so much she wanted to say.

She thought she would have more time. Why of all days, did the boys have to show up *today*? She wanted to have just one lazy morning, waking up to Kakashi in peace.

She thought they would have a chance to talk more. She could explain more. She wasn't ready.

"Well? What do you think?" she didn't dare look at him.

"They are...still Sasuke and Naruto—mostly."

"Don't worry about Sasuke. I know he was harsh today, but he's just in a mood and found an old scab to pick at. He's actually quite happy for us, and I'm happy for him—I actually think he'll be married soon again too."

Kakashi hummed quietly. She didn't know what else to say.

After several gut-wrenching moments of thought, she dragged her eyes up to sneak a peek at him.

*Oh, Kakashi...* she thought.

He was standing there shoulders back, posture straight, his stance squared. Like he was waiting for her to deliver the punch. His charcoal eye bore straight into her—hardened and anguished. And—

And it broke her heart.

Why did he always end up getting hurt? Why was he used to bracing himself against the sting of losing someone? She never, never, *never* wanted to add to the long list of people that left him behind.

Her fists compacted into tight coils against her thigh. She was so frustrated at herself—why couldn't she just leave him alone? She should have just let him be...

"Haruno..." His voice was like ice. Sakura tried not to flinch at the name. "You should go."

"*Hatake*." She forced out, but it caught in her throat. "My name is Hatake, and don't you dare try to take that away from me."

His gaze drifted away from her, but she saw the click of his jaw tighten.

"Sakura," he conceded. "...You need to go."

She stared at him for a long moment—her eyes stung, and her stomach was rolling. She was going to cry and then vomit—Or maybe vomit, and then cry—either way, she wasn't getting out of this unscathed.

“Yes,” she whispered airily. “I do need to go.”

She tried to swallow down whatever bile that was threatening to rise in her throat and steeled her nerves. She wiped her face vigorously with her hands.

She could do this. She could say goodbye the right way. Maybe—if she did this right—she could leave something behind so he wouldn't be alone.

She crossed the room to the little table by the entryway. There was a little pad of paper and pen with a scribbled out list of groceries on it. She tore that page away and began to draw on the next.

“Sakura...” his tone sounded like a warning, but it was pitifully half-hearted.

“Shhh. Let me think. Let me do this—” she scribbled furiously and bit her lip in concentration. When she was done, she tore away the little slip of paper and began folding it several times.

“What are you...?”

“Hush.”

She taught Sarada how to do this a week ago—a fold here, a tuck there—And the little square paper turned into a simple origami shape—the face of a dog. She used the pen to draw in the nose and eyes and few added details.

When she was done, she slipped the small origami dog into her pocket and dropped the pen. Kakashi was nice enough not to ask anything more about her impromptu craft session. Smart man.

*She could do this*, she told herself. She's faced worse.

Sakura crossed the room with confident steps, and marched herself right up to him. His jaw tensed and his single eye narrowed at her in warning. She watched the bob of his Adam's apple—he was nervous.

Perfect, so was she.

She pushed at his shoulders lightly until he gave up and followed her as she guided him down to the couch. She sat him down and stood in front of him. Gently—as much her nervous fingers could manage—she slipped behind his head and untied his hitai-ate. Pulling it off, she placed it softly on the coffee table next to her knees.

His Sharingan spun slowly as she was met with both mismatched eyes.

Oh my, she was going to miss the mismatched eyes.

There was something telling about his Sharingan—it wasn't like Sasuke's controlled one—no.

Kakashi's Sharingan was *expressive*. It spun at different speeds according to his mood and it glowed with his emotions. It was an involuntary window into his thoughts—like a dog wagging his tail when happy.

She loved it dearly.

Next, she slipped a finger in between his mask and the skin of his cheek. She glanced up to ask permission, and he hummed lightly in response. Sakura pushed down the mask to his neck—and took in his small, mangled frown and his pained eyes. She placed his face in her hands.

Her Kakashi.

Her beautiful, intelligent, brave, loyal Kakashi.

Her eyes stung—*now* she was going to cry. Gods, she loves him.

“Kakashi...” she rested her forehead against his, and squeezed her eyes shut. Silver hair tickled her temples, and she wondered if she were Ino, could she just dump all her thoughts into his brain and walk away.

But no—she was not Ino.

She bumped her forehead against his like she was trying to banish the thought.

“There's so much I wish I could tell you...the moments you will face. The *people* you'll have to confront—I can't even—I'm sorry. I wish I could be there with you.” *I don't want to leave you.* She took a deep

breath. “But trust Naruto. He’s smarter than any of us knew. Sasuke... it’s going to be tough, but he will come around eventually. Don’t worry about me—I’ll be fine until later—*then* I’ll need you. Be nice to poor Yamato. Just ignore Sai—”

Her chest heaved. Oh, hell—her eyes were watering. Vision blurred.

“The world’s going to go to hell—but we’ll come out alright. *It’s all going to be okay.* Just keep going—don’t stop. No matter what.” She was sniffing and poor Kakashi—she couldn’t even see him through her bleary eyes. “I’d tell you not to stress, but we both know that’s impossible. Just make sure you eat, and get enough sleep—”

Ugh, that’s not what she wanted to say.

“No.” Sakura squeezed eyes shut as hard as she could manage. Tears were still slipping through. “That’s not the *point*.”

Her sweet, dear, adorable Kakashi kindly lifted his hands to her hips and gave her an affectionate squeeze as a comfort for her blatant desperation. He must think her crazy.

She pulled away from him just enough to take in his face. Sakura kept her hands tethered to his jaw and neck like a lifeline. She felt wrecked.

“*I love you.*” She choked the words ungracefully, but it would have to do. “I’m so in love with you—it’s stupid really.”

How she thought she could do this without crying, was beyond her.

“If they took our love and laid it out on a scale—mine would outweigh yours so much, it should absolutely be worrisome. I’m *confident* that I love you so much more, than you love me. We are entirely unbalanced. And yet—”

Hell, she couldn’t catch her breath—she was sobbing. At some point she registered that Kakashi was wiping tears from her face.

“And yet—” she tried again. “I will take anything you give me. Happily. Whether we have five years together or fifty—I will always choose you, Kakashi. Always. In this world, or any other.”

She was kissing his hand now between her sobs—small pecks on his wrist and palm.

“You and me. I don’t know what it is—but you’ve got something I need, Kakashi. I honestly think you and I must have been hurtling through the stars together as specks of dust—over and over again—we’ve come together. Hundreds or thousands of lives together. Past lives—future lives—but...I’m so glad we made it to this time *now*.”

Ah, kami. She hoped he understood what she was trying to say—even through her broken words and sobs.

“*You and me*.” She kissed his palm again. She couldn’t stop. “Don’t let the future scare you at all—don’t be afraid, Kakashi—because even if the world falls apart, and we have nothing, we have *us*.”

*Oh*. He was kissing her now. Sakura was doing her best to try not to whimper uncontrollably like a child. His lips pressed to hers and she could have died from the relief.

His tongue snaked its way into her mouth, and Sakura met it eagerly. (*Oh boy*, did she.)

Her face was still embarrassingly damp, and she could only imagine how puffy her eyes were. Her nose was dangerously close to running, and she could barely breathe.

She did not feel particularly beautiful. Or womanly. Or sexy.

But—

She thought it may have been one of the best kisses of her life.

And when it was done, he cradled her face in his hands and wiped away the last stray tears along her jaw.

“A thousand lifetimes sound great, Sakura. But even if we only get *one* life,” he murmured firmly. “I want to live it with you.”

Yes, she thought. *That’s exactly what I wanted to say*.

He snuck his hand down until grabbed hers and he lifted it to the seal on her stomach. The seal’s chakra flared underneath her fingers.

It broke her heart all over again.

She took a step back from him—and gave him one last look.

His right eye—*his* charcoal eye—was red rimmed, and she thought maybe he had a trail of tears of his own. His lips—red and swollen



from their kiss. His silver hair was mused and sticking out in all the most absurd directions.

And—

He was *still* the most beautiful person she had ever seen.

She didn't say goodbye.

She touched her fingers to the five chakra points of the seal, and she pushed her chakra into it.

The seal glowed—and Kakashi crumbled.

He fell to his knees with his head in his hands, and a groan on his lips. She placed two fingers on his forehead with a muttered genjutsu—she watched him collapse onto the couch in sleep.

She had a few last things she needed to do.

Half an hour later—the room was clean and cleared of all of her presence. But she left what few things that she wanted to leave behind.

He groaned in his sleep again as she watched his face scrunch up in distress.

She didn't stay to see if he was alright. Sakura grabbed the tanto and fastened it to her back.

She didn't look back. She didn't stop. She ran as fast as she could to the edge of the town. And right before the tree line cleared and Training Field Seven opened up, she bit her thumb and summoned.

Pakkun poofed into life in front of her. He looked around wildly, as surely he was in shock from being summoned by someone who was not Kakashi.

“Pakkun...do you—” she struggled. “Would you happen to remember who I am?”

He looked her over—then his tail wagged. “Of course I do. You're the Boss's mate.”

She let out a breath she didn't know she was holding.

“Oh hell, thank you...It looks like the seal doesn't work for summons

—you were probably in a different world when it activated, but Kakashi won't remember me anymore, okay?"

He bobbed his head in a canine nod. "Gotcha, we'll look after him for you."

"I was wondering if you could do me a favor—I wanted to leave him something. And I thought it would be best if it came from you. Would that be alright?"

Pakkun grinned—if dogs could grin—and strutted up to her happily.

"Here," she pulled out the little origami dog. She gathered her chakra and muttered a simple genjutsu on the paper. "Give this to him whenever you feel it's right—when it's not too suspicious, I mean."

She tucked the little letter into one of the pockets of his vest. After securing it safely, she bent down and pulled Pakkun's paw to her gently. Sakura rubbed the soft pad of his paw for good luck.

"*Thank you*, Pakkun." She petted him affectionately. "Please take care of him."

"Anything for you, Boss-Lady."

She smiled. As she turned to go to Naruto and Sasuke, the sound of a *pop!* echoed in the clearing as Pakkun left.

Naruto smiled. Sasuke grumbled. Sakura looked.

Sakura took in one last look—

The red Hokage building of her childhood, the mountain without her husband's or her Shishou's face on it.

Everything as it was. Once upon a time ago.

And with everything she came to this time with—

She left with as well.

-

[image]

Chapter End Notes

FUN FACT#1: This entire chapter is inspired by the song  
Something I Need, by One Republic.

FUN FACT#2: There are many 11th Doctor(Matt Smith)/River Song  
vibes in this chapter. 'Spoilers'. 'That's not the point'. etc. are all  
Doctor Who references.

FUN FACT #3: Feminine names given to (especially manly) men  
is kind of a growing trend in Japan. A good example of this is  
Nanami Kento from JJK. But my husband is also a member of this  
club, years before it was growing popular lol and we have passed  
this on with our boys without really meaning too hehe. So, I  
wanted to have this for Kakashi and Sakura.

Life update: I made it to Japan! (and I'm still alive 🤖. Ha! take  
that stress!) Now I'm going to an O-bon festival, eat lots of food  
(like seriously, I almost wept over a bowl of Ramen. It was so  
good.) and enjoy life lol.

Thank you to all the kind well-wishers~

The commenters~

The kudos-ers~

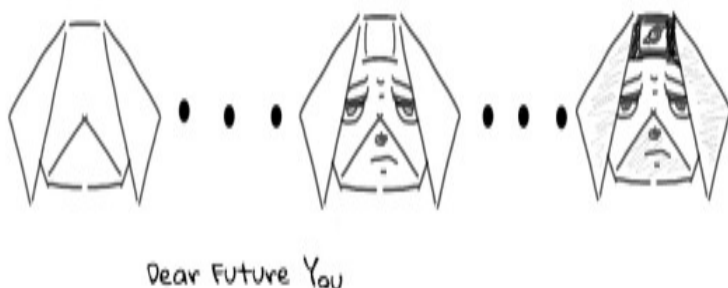
I hope...you all love this chapter as much as I did.

# You are my Future-Part 1

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

[image]



[image]

## Chapter 8: You are my Future

Kakashi awoke with his head pounding.

He was slumped over the couch. His back ached and his neck—*fuck*—he was getting too old to pass out on a couch.

He tried to straighten out his crooked spine with a stiff groan as each vertebra snapped back in alignment. He pulled the fabric that was pooled around his neck back into place over his nose. It didn't smell like booze—in fact, he smelled berries...and something floral...

*A woman?*

He did a quick scan around his apartment to see if he had the unfortunate luck of bringing home someone.

The bed was made (a good sign). His extra futon was out, but it was folded. He followed his nose to the bathroom—an extra towel was thrown in the clothes bin but that could have been him or even one of the pack.

The room was pleasantly empty—no ninken either. How late was it?

Kakashi stretched and made his way to the window near his bed. The sun was high in the sky—midday, at least. With a yawn, he rubbed the back of his head gingerly. It was still pounding and foggy and he couldn't remember much—certainly no memories of a bar.

Maybe it wasn't alcohol. The last thing he remembered was coming home from the Land of Waves...

It could have been chakra exhaustion.

He did have a track record for passing out after particularly difficult missions. It certainly wouldn't be the first time—*but*—he usually made it to the bed. (Most of the time.)

He tried to think back...

A blurry haze flashed in his mind. Familiar bantering and annoying children. Naruto? Sasuke?

Sasuke was mad. Naruto was smiling. They were older though—someone was yelling at them, but he couldn't remember who.

*Older?* —that's not right—they're kids.

...a dream?

Yes, it must have been a dream.

His stomach growled aggressively, derailing any collective thoughts. Ah, he really shouldn't skip meals. Kakashi scratched his stomach mindlessly and pulled the fridge door open to see if he could scramble up something to eat.

Inside, he found plastic containers—all lined up in perfectly aligned stacks in little towers—neat and organized like he often did when he had leftovers.

He didn't remember cooking.

He popped a few of the lids off, to see what he had and grabbed the small pot that was sitting on a different shelf. He began heating up the food, and when it was all laid out before him—

Rice, miso soup, grilled eggplant and glazed fish.

The rice was glossy. The miso soup smelled of dashi and his childhood. The eggplant, a little more savory. The glaze was a little sweeter.

It was really fucking delicious for some reason.

Kakashi hummed in approval.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

Her long hair was shredded unevenly and sheared short. Clothes torn. Every inch of her skin was covered in dirt, scrapes, and dried blood. A bruise was forming around her left eye.

She looked pitiful.

Naruto and Sasuke seemed mostly okay.

But Sakura—

He was proud of the girl for not backing out and stopping her teammate from taking the Chunin Exam, but she was a liability—she couldn't keep up with them.

Kakashi scoffed under his breath. Maybe this would be the wakeup call? Or she'd stay a career genin? Either way—she didn't belong.

The individual matches began for the Chunin participants, and Kakashi watched on, mildly impressed with some of the combatants.

Sasuke won his round, of course.

An Aburame kid won his own with his bugs—another triumph for Konoha. Then a Suna Puppet Master that was arrogant, but effective. Kakashi instantly didn't like him.

And then Sakura's name came up.

Asuma sauntered up to him for a minute as they prepared for the match.

“You should tell your student to forfeit. No civilian is going to be

equally matched with a clan heiress,” he said it with airy blankness—like it was inevitable. A foreseen shogi move falling in the order of his game.

Kakashi stared at the man.

“You’re welcome to say that to *her*. But she’s a stubborn girl.”

Asuma flicked ash from his cigarette, “Well...life always has a way of teaching us lessons.”

It didn’t matter if Kakashi agreed with him or not—

The Copy-nin didn’t like the finality in his tone.

Asuma kept walking on to his other students, and Kakashi looked down at his own.

She was staring at the Yamanaka heiress with clear, observant green eyes. Like a pensive cat, ready to pounce. It was a calculating look that he had not seen often.

He watched her shoulder rise and fall—and he realized she was doing breathing exercises. Nervous, maybe? Afraid, probably.

And as he watched Hayate signal the start of the match—

—he realized, Life’s Lesson?

It was for *him*.

He watched Sakura bash someone’s face in with a fist. Saw as she pulled the girl’s hair. And even throw a Yamanaka out of her head.

It wasn’t the most technical or impressive of fights. She didn’t even use chakra.

But as he stared at the girl passed out on the floor from a double knock out—

The *same* girl that didn’t want to break a nail or damage her clothes—

Kakashi learned that—*when she wanted to*—Sakura could be scrappy and mean.

And she would *fight*—and try to survive in this world.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

He woke up in the hospital, which wasn't a new experience for him.

The room was dark—his head was pounding again, especially Obito's eye— and long shadows were being cast from the moonlight.

He was wearing a paper medical mask in an attempt to hide his face (well, how nice of them). And he was quietly trying to take stock of his aching body, as he scanned the room and found Pakkun sitting at the end of his bed, in between his legs.

"Yo."

"*Pakkun*." His voice was scratchy.

"How ya feeling, Boss?"

"Like..." he cleared his dry throat. "...I *almost* died."

The pug let out a gruff laugh. "So, pretty normal for you, then?"

Traitor. Kakashi stared up at the ceiling, trying to soothe his head.

"...what happened?"

"The Uchiha welp got the better of you. The older one—Itachi. But considering you didn't *call for us*—"

Oh, right. He was mentally tortured within a Sharingan.

"Yeah, well...I always was a little soft when it came to fighting an Uchiha."

The pug growled low under his breath. "One day, it will get you *killed*."

He didn't bother to reply. He rolled his neck back and forth for a few seconds before turning to the small side table that sat next to the bed. He must have been asleep for a while then—weeks maybe.



On it sat several gifts. He spotted a handwritten ‘*get-well-soon*’ that was signed by his genin. A few more cards from different jonin teammates. A small plush turtle that could only be from Gai. A single daffodil in a small vase and—

He reached for it—

A small, folded piece of paper that looked like Pakkun. An origami dog.

Someone had folded the paper to look like the face of a dog, with droopy ears and a snout—and then drew in—Pakkun’s markings, grumpy hooded eyes, little face wrinkles, and his Konoha headband.

It looked just like him.

It was fucking *adorable*.

“Who made this?”

Pakkun stood and came closer. He gave the paper a small sniff.

“I don’t know...but it smells...”

Kakashi’s nose twitched. He brought the paper to his nose. He sniffed once, and then exhaled in a shaky breath, before inhaling deeply as he closed his eyes.

Yes...it was subtle...but summer berries and jasmine filled his lungs as warmth spread in his chest.

He opened his eyes and stared at it for a little longer before gently placing it on the table, propped up against the vase with the yellow flower. He ran a finger along one of the creases of the folded ear as his eyelids grew heavy.

Kakashi pulled the sheet up, almost around his nose, and sank into the uncomfortable hospital bed. Pakkun curled into a ball near his legs. He continued to stare at the origami-Pakkun.

“I’m glad you’re okay, Boss.”

He didn’t answer. As he fell asleep, it almost seemed like the paper canine spoke instead of the actual dog.

It was pouring. *Raining cats and dogs*, his father would say. Like the sky was crying frustrated, angry tears.

The Hokage was *dead*. Hayate too.

He remembered the weather being just like this on the day of the funerals—he stood next to Asuma and Yugao for hours after everyone else had gone.

He remembered when the elders cornered him, and tried to pass the Hokagedom to him like it was an honor. When he couldn't protect anyone, much less a fucking village.

He remembered how his chakra crackled in the air, charging the atmosphere, and the raindrops stung as they landed on his skin. Their faces as they backed away from him in fear.

And then *today*—

Today, Sasuke was gone.

Sakura was crying, even though he promised her everything would go back to normal. And Naruto almost had a hole in chest—because *he* taught Sasuke the chidori. And *he* was too slow—

And *he*—

Fuck. He couldn't even protect his own.

He stared at the war memorial in the rain, and he wondered if Obito's was laughing at him for fucking up *another* team.

Kakashi didn't know how long he'd been out there, but by the time he made it home, it was dark. Eight grim, pity filled faces stared at him in silence as he trekked his way through his apartment.

The ninken didn't dare say a word.

And as he slugged off his soaking wet uniform, he noticed something by his bed. On the ledge, right under the window, where the two photos of his teams—one with Minato as sensei, one with *him*— and propped up in between them, lay the little origami-Pakkun.

He thought he had forgotten it at the hospital. It was cute, and cheerful—and terribly out of place.

A voice he didn't recognize popped in his head—it was clear and ringing. A woman's voice. It rattled in him so violently, like a tuning fork going off in between his ribs.

*Sasuke...it's going to be tough, but he will come around eventually.*

He huffed out a strained laugh. Not entirely sure where that came from. His Sharingan always did pull out the strangest things every once in a while...

But...for some reason, he felt a little better.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

It had been over two years since Team 7 had dispersed.

Kakashi had kept himself busy by drowning himself in the murky swamp that was ANBU. He took mission after mission, and was rarely seen around the village these days.

His teamwork had been abysmal recently, and Tsunade-hime was kind enough to let him wallow in his misery by offering him strings of solo-missions. (He had never been so thankful to his Hokage before.)

He thought about Naruto sometimes—

...and hoped Jiraiya was twice the teacher he was.

He thought of Sasuke often—

...the regret was branded onto his skin like an infected scar, and he pledged he would have Orochimaru's throat someday.

He *rarely* thought of Sakura.

It wasn't until he was sitting on a mission outside the outer rim of Iwa one day, that he was suddenly reminded of her.

There were rumors of Akatsuki in these parts, and Konoha had sent Kakashi out to investigate. But all he came upon was a rogue cell that was slightly under his pay grade. He sent word back to headquarters to see if he should eliminate the cell, or keep moving north.

It wasn't long before Pakkun came running down the rocky path with three ANBU behind him. The little pug led them to his hidden shack that was nestled among the stony cliffs of Iwa.

“Look what I found,” Pakkun panted in a grumpy tone.

The three ANBU strolled up—a blank looking mask he didn't recognize, a Mouse, and a Bear.

“Hound.” Bear nodded. “We've been called in to take care of the cell while you keep moving. Can you give us any information?”

Bear was a large man with a smooth voice that Kakashi instantly recognized. He was a mid-level Captain that often dealt with ‘*demolition*’ as he liked to call it. Or a heavy hitter with little, to no subtlety.

Kakashi rattled off what he knew—perimeters, numbers, and anything else that could be useful.

The Mouse interrupted every once in a while, asking asinine questions. He had seen this Mouse before a few times, a man with shoulder length hair and a lean wiry build of a young adult that hadn't quite grown into his body yet. A newbie.

“Good. And what should we do with this information?” Bear asked Mouse, with a gentle leading.

Oh—tactical training.

Kakashi wondered what Bear did to be stuck on babysitting duty.

His eye trailed behind the two males, to the blank mask.

It was an unusual mask—no colored markings, just solid white—with huge round gaping eye holes and a rounded snout that had indents on it like whiskers.

He had no idea what kind of animal it was supposed to be—and that made it all the more ominous. It was haunting, eerie, and ghost-like—even more so than other masks.

The young girl—if she *was* a girl—couldn't have been more than fifteen or sixteen.

Sakura's age, he thought. What a bizarre thought.

She had to be quite skilled to already be in ANBU at this age. It was impressive.

Her body was small and shapeless, with tanned skin the color of caramel and purple eggplant colored hair that was cut short and tied at the base of her neck.

She stayed utterly silent through Bear and Mouse's exchange. The blank mask ANBU clung close on the other side of Bear—almost fully concealed from Kakashi's sight behind Bear's bulk. When she noticed that he was watching her, she took an extra half step back to remain hidden behind Bear's bicep.

But Kakashi didn't miss how amber colored eyes flashed beneath the mask and cast a glare at him.

She didn't like him for some reason. Interesting.

"Pup! Pay attention! This could be a matter of life or death," Bear barked at the blank mask.

Pup? That can't be right. Surely, he was the only canine in ANBU.

Bear seemed to notice the tilt of his head in question.

"She's a seal—a *seal* pup. She's such a small thing that everyone was calling her a baby seal, and it morphed into 'pup'. Don't blame me if you've got a problem with it—I didn't start it," Bear clarified defensively.

Kakashi stared at the girl. She blatantly ignored him.

"But you're a 'clean-up' team. Will she be alright?"

Kakashi startled for a second, wondering where the voice had come from. The thought matched his own, and wondered if he accidentally asked the question out loud himself.

Until he was able to reorientate himself to the sound of the voice coming from below him—from Pakkun.

He raised a brow at the dog.

Pakkun was wagging his tail next to him. *Odd...*

Bear stared between him and the dog as if he was unsure if he was allowed to answer the ninken. Pakkun waited patiently.

“...I know she doesn’t look like much, but Pup is a hard hitter. She can take care of herself.” Bear answered reluctantly as if he was unsure of how to proceed with this oddity.

Kakashi shrugged and turned to leave them to their mission, but as he did—Pakkun marched himself up to the girl. He sat down and raised his paw to her.

“Hey, kid.” The ninken gruffed. “Good luck, okay? Here. I’ll even let you touch my paw.”

Golden eyes stared down the little dog. She then crouched down and rubbed her thumb against the dog’s paw—Pakkun’s tail wagged a little more. She gave his head a little pat, and then apparently having had enough, she stood up straight and continued ignoring the rest of them dutifully.

Pakkun happily pranced alongside him and started off on a jog away from the group. He let several minutes pass in silence.

“What was *that* ?” Kakashi asked as he side eyed the dog. “You were practically preening for her...”

The canine gave a low growl and a shake of his tail as he ran beside him. “I like her.”

“I can see that,” he deadpanned. “I didn’t know you had such a liking for kids.”

“She won’t be a kid for much longer.”

Kakashi eyed the dog skeptically.

“Besides, I got a good feeling about her.”

The Copy-nin couldn’t help but scoff. “Great, next time you can ask *her* for a belly rub.”

Pakkun snapped at his heels. He barely dodged.

He trailed into the Hokage's office with a heaviness in his limbs, and scent of blood and death.

It wafted off him in such a stink, that he feared it would forever be ingrained in his scent for the rest of his life. Steeped into his bones, like an over brewed tea in a porcelain cup.

He slipped his ANBU mask from his face as he sat in the chair in front of a large desk.

"Are you sure your dog is house trained?" A man asked. Once Kakashi's eyes focused, he recognized him as Jiraiya.

"He's *fine*. I've just been keeping him busy lately," Tsunade-sama contested. She was tapping her finger nervously on her desk though.

"He looks feral."

Tsunade shot the man with a glare. "He'll *adjust*."

Jiraiya did not look convinced.

"Hiya, kid. You look...well...you look alive—at least."

Kakashi snorted. He cracked his neck. The sound rang out thunderously in the quiet room.

"...Maybe we should hold off—"

Tsunade slammed her fist on the desk. "No. The Akatsuki are ramping up. It's time."

Jiraiya pursed his lips but kept silent—it reminded him of Naruto.

Tsunade-sama stared at him long and hard.

"Kakashi, that was your last mission. You're off the ANBU roster—"

He almost snarled.

"—because—*calm down, you menace!*—Two thirds of your team is ready. The previous Team 7 with the addition of Tenzo, now known as

Yamato, will be under your command.” She bit the nail of her thumb, “And maybe another, but I haven’t decided yet.”

Kakashi blinked at her stupidly. He must be hearing things.

He was sure that he was, until Jiraiya came up to him and promptly slapped him on the back with a huge grin, and said:

“Congrats, kid. They’re *your* problem now.”

Kakashi stared at the man.

Fuck.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

The bell test went well. The kids were—well, they weren’t *quite* kids anymore—caught somewhere in between being an adult and a child.

An awkward phase that Kakashi couldn’t really relate to, as it seemed he somehow skipped over that phase completely. But he was determined to try.

Naruto was easy. He knew what he had to do.

The boy had sprouted up in height. He was a little more considerate, and a little more thoughtful—like he could feel the weight of his future on his shoulders.

Jiraiya had taught him exactly *one thing*— how to be a powerhouse. A one hit wonder. A one-and-done kind of ninja that tended to jump the gun.

Kakashi could relate to that (i.e. his *chidori* ) but fuck if that didn’t mean he still had a laundry list of things he needed to teach him if Naruto was ever going to be a well-rounded shinobi.

Sakura—

She was—

—he didn’t know *what* to do with her.



She was the one that equally surprised him and concerned him.

She looked the same to him—maybe more muscle. Still short—and ridiculously pink. She still had a temper, and she certainly was still clever.

But every once in a while, she would raise her eyes through her eyelashes demurely or flash a flirtatious smirk to Naruto or one of her friends—and Kakashi had to look away.

It felt wrong to see a young woman grow into a more sexual nature—even if was still awkward and fumbling in her youth. She was learning how to use her womanly charms—it wasn't sitting right with him.

She was starting to look—and *fight*— more like a kunoichi.

Her strength was obviously a surprise, and Tsunade-sama had clearly done a great job with her. But her overall skill and range was so much further ahead than Naruto that he honestly didn't know if he could help her when he was so concerned about him.

Evidently, he misjudged her.

He didn't notice it at first, but then there were times when he was trying to teach Naruto about something like chakra concepts—and he'd look over at her—and she would raise a brow and stare at him. Like *why are you looking at me? I obviously already know this.*

Which made him sweat a little bit—because, doesn't that mean he's still underestimating her?

Hasn't he *learned* by now?

He felt like he was walking a very thin line with her—somewhere between hate and mild respect.

Sometimes he'd get a smile (even if it was a little fake), and sometimes he felt like she would slit his throat in his sleep.

(Teenage girls. *Yikes.*)

He couldn't read her. He didn't know *what* she was capable of.

(And what a scary thought, that is.)

The stars were out tonight, and out there in the middle of the desert, the depth of the sky lit up with swirls of milk and splatters of golden honey.

He always hated the open sky—it was too vast; too large—it made him feel utterly vulnerable.

No, he preferred the tree covered sky of Konoha. Where he could hide among the shadows of their leaves, so he wouldn't be swallowed whole by the expanse above him.

He shivered in the cold Suna night.

While Gai and Naruto snored loudly, Neji slept in a stilled stiffness that resembled death. Tenten was walking a perimeter not far from camp, and Sakura was poking the fire with exhausted eyes.

Kakashi was resting against a petrified log that was propping him up in his fatigue. He was trying to read *Icha Icha*, but the fire light was making his eyes strain.

They had managed to recover the Kazekage—*alive*. Somehow.

“I should congratulate you...”

She startled at the sound of his voice like she didn't expect it to come from him. A log crackled as it shifted in the fire at the end of her stick.

“You're the first of our village to eliminate an Akatsuki member. It's an impressive feat.”

Sakura stared at him impassively. Her green eyes glowed gold in the fire, and her hair almost looked like a pale lilac in the starlight. She looked different. Not like the Sakura he thought he knew.

She snorted after a moment, and then went back to poking the embers.

“I didn't do it by myself.” She whispered solemnly.

“...No, but I somehow doubt you sat by the sidelines.”

She shrugged, “I’m only alive because of Chiyo-obaasama.”

“Semantics. You’ll be written as the winner. And then there will be a little note in the Bingo book next to your name—and a nice little moniker to go along with it.”

“—and a bounty.”

“Yes, and a bounty,” He repeated slowly. “...And it will continue to go up with each successful kill. Although...I have a feeling this isn’t your *first* kill.”

No, she was far too composed. Tsunade must have put her to work on other teams throughout the years.

She stared at him again with contemplative eyes. Those green feline eyes he’d seen from her once before.

“No.” She spoke softly, but the tone was concise. “It is not.”

He hummed in acknowledgment.

“Well, regardless...well done, Sakura.”

Her lips twitched a little into a small smile. “Thank you, Sensei.”

It was quiet for a few minutes, as he pretended to read.

“*Kakashi*.”

She flickered her eyes back up to him in confusion. “...what?”

“My teammates call me ‘*Kakashi*’.”

She stared at him with her brows furrowed in puzzlement.

“I was never much of your sensei anyway.” He clarified, but kept his eye on his book.

He felt the shift in her—the moment of understanding. She straightened her back, and licked her lips and swallowed with wide, owlsh eyes.

“I...okay. Thank you...Kakashi.”

He eye-crinkled a smile. “You’re welcome, Sakura.”

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

Time passed, and then there was...

So much sadness. So much anger.

Asuma was—

Gone.

One day he was alive and well—and with a wife that was with child—and the next...

So, he volunteered. Kakuzu and Hidan.

He would rip the very souls from their bodies, and offer it to Asuma's ghost himself.

The Akatsuki would be lesser. And Konoha would be better off.

So, he was out for blood. *Who cares?* No one would stop him.

So, they let it be. They let him *hunt*.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

Pein and the Akatsuki had done a number on the village.

It had only been hours since the attack, but it was still shocking to see.

He helped where he could, and when he was done, he went back to where his apartment once stood.

It was just a few barely standing walls and mostly rubble now.

He sifted through the debris of where he could approximate where his

rooms might have been. It was astonishing to see that some things were whole and had little damage, while others were just... *obliterated.*

He found some of his books, Gai's blanket, some old dog bowls, Kushina's bowl that was split into three pieces and would need to be super glued—his photos had broken frames, but the pictures were intact.

He lifted the picture of Team 7 and found underneath it the little origami dog.

It was crinkled badly and torn on one edge—but it still somehow survived.

He couldn't help but laugh a little bit. It must be lucky.

He tried to smooth it out—bending the paper back and forth to try and repress the creases. When he bent the snout, he saw ink on the inside corner.

Curiously, Kakashi folded down the corner and opened up the paper dog.

It was a drawing—

Of a scarecrow underneath a tree blooming with flowers.

The scarecrow's face was a *henohenomoheji* tucked under a straw hat, with an oversized jacket, and towel tied around its neck.

It was simple. There was no color. Only black ink. It was crude and childlike in a way—rushed maybe—but it was rounded and cute in such a way that made him think a female was responsible for it.

Underneath it was the words:

*Dear Kakashi, it's all going to be okay...*

*Because—*

*You and Me.*

*That's all we ever really needed.*

An unknown chakra buzzed at his fingertips and some of the words bled from the page like ink fading into water. The picture disappeared.

Only the words, *You and me*, remained on the page a moment longer before they too faded away.

Obito's eye pulsed. He heard the woman's voice again—

*You and me.*

*—if the world falls apart, and we have nothing, we have us.*

His heart started racing—the sound of his blood pumping in his ears—as he tried to suck in a deep breath, but it stuttered in his chest.

He was having a panic attack.

The world tilted, his eyes blurred, and he heard a voice coming towards him. The old civilian man from three doors down was yelling something at him—

Then it all went black.

And when he opened his eyes again—it was to pink and green.

Sakura was standing over him with a dirt and blood smudged face, and eyes with dark rings underneath them. She seemed too young to look like she'd gone through hell.

She let out a loud relieved sigh. She collapsed into a chair that was tucked by his hospital bed. They seemed to be in a triage tent.

“You.” She hissed at him while pulling her hair a bit. She looked stressed. “You *foolish, idiotic*— you shouldn't be walking around with chakra exhaustion, Kakashi.”

Ah, so that's what happened. He didn't remember much. He would have to go back for his things later then.

She stared at him with an angry huff, as she waited for an explanation. Too bad he didn't have one.

“Whoops. Seems like it's hard to break old habits.”

He tried to give her an eye-smile, but his eyelids felt heavy and hooded. He really must be tired.

Sakura scoffed and grumbled at him under her breath. Her head leaned back on the small chair as she stared at the ceiling with narrowed, haunted eyes. She was quiet for a moment.

And then in a small soft voice—

“I heard you died.” She sucked in air between her lips. “Like good and properly *dead*.”

He hummed for a second and saw his father’s face behind closed eyelids.

“I was.”

Her jade eyes flicked over to him with a piercing, defiant look. “That’s *not* okay.”

He chuckled darkly. “We’re *shinobi*—”

“I mean it, Kakashi. *You*, and Naruto, Sai, and Yamato—*no one* is allowed to die.”

His hooded eyes met hers in a hostile battle. “It’s war, Sakura.”

She stood up harshly. The chair screeched as it was pushed back by the force.

“I know that,” she snarled. “But I’m going to keep all of you alive—”

She turned and walked away from him. Her shoulders, a little more squared.

“—*no matter the cost*.”

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

“Kakashi-sama—”

Fuck. “Don’t—let’s—not do *that*. Kakashi is fine.”

“Sir,” the Boar ANBU pressed. “The village is in shambles—more than half of it was *flattened*— and you’re the interim Hokage while

Tsunade-sama is indisposed. The Hokage Summit is soon. *We need direction.*”

They were set up in some random building on the outskirts of the city that would act as the temporary Headquarters. He stared at the desk some do-gooding chunnin must have put in the room to make it feel like the Hokage’s.

He purposely took three steps away from it.

“Right.” Kakashi cleared his throat. He looked at Inoichi and Shikaku—why weren’t one of *them* interim Hokage? “Good. Go ahead, and report.”

The Boar commander lifted his clipboard.

“All ANBU personnel have been called in shortly after the Pein attack. They’ve been divided into groups based on which teams were deemed fit enough for immediate relocation. A small number were left here for Tsunade-sama and your own—” The Boar coughed awkwardly. “—*protection.*”

Not necessary but okay, he thought.

“Normal shinobi have been stationed along the open borders in case of another enemy invasion. The rest of the ANBU—” he coughed again. “—we sent out further than our borders on Shikaku-san’s insistence.”

Ah, laying the blame somewhere else. Kakashi was tempted to pull out his book.

“All teams have reported on any movement and have now returned after a week of surveillance. Only one team ran into trouble—somewhere along the Rain and Grass border.” He paused like he was choosing his words carefully. “Although it seemed Uzumaki was able to gain the favor of the remaining Akatsuki, Pein had a serious following—one that borderline’s worship, even. There are...some disgruntled cells that blame Konoha for his fall.”

Kakashi eyed Shikaku. “You think this is more than an isolated incident?”

The older Nara hummed a bit before pulling at his goatee. “I do.” he said, cryptically. Ever the shogi-master. “...but I think we should talk to the team too.”

The Boar commander nodded, “I’ll send them in.”

They watched the large man turn and exit the room.

Inoichi cleared his throat, “If this isn’t a problem *now*, it will be one day. Won’t it?”

Shikaku let out a great bored sigh. “Shinobi tend to be vindictive folk. It’s why the world is always going to shit.”

Kakashi rubbed his temples. He had to agree, “Definitely going to bite us in the ass someday.”

A knock at the door. Inoichi barked out, “Enter.”

Three ANBU dragged themselves into the room. They were torn up with blood scrapes and caked in dirt—though he recognized them immediately, even though it had been nearly two years.

...*Bear, Mouse, and Seal.*

Seal cocked her head at him in interest.

“Ready to report, sir.” Bear supplied helpfully.

“Go ahead.”

“Everything was normal, sir. There was some movement on the Ame border, but we deemed this normal with their leadership in the state that... *it is*. We then came across a compound just on the edge of Kusa. It seemed abandoned...we decided to take a look...”

“I’m guessing it was not abandoned.”

Bear kept quiet.

Mouse, the young man, decided to speak up, “No, sir. It fucking *wasn’t*.”

Bear cleared his throat. “It seemed to be some sort of religious compound—*mostly* civilians—but there were some Ame nin that now may be missing-nin. To be honest sir, the numbers—”

“They popped out of hidden doorways like a fucking swarm of *bees*—” injected Mouse.

Bear ignored him. “They were a little overwhelming.”

Seal snorted.

Bear cleared his throat. “We were, frankly, *overrun*.”

“By civilians?” He asked, while looking at Shikaku and Inoichi.

“By civilians. *And* some nin.”

“Crazy, bloodthirsty, *fanatics*—”

“There were so many. And—well, we—were *trying* to be gentle at first with the civilians but again, the *numbers*—”

“Fucking *insane*—”

“So, we ended up with some injuries.”

Seal coughed rudely.

Kakashi raised a brow. “Oh?”

Bear looked like he was ready to throw himself out a window. He spoke in a low mumble. “I took a pitchfork to my calf. Mouse was hit on the back of the head—”

“With a fucking *frying pan*—”

“—we were immobilized, to say the least. And Pup—”

“She deserves a fucking promotion—”

“She—she saved our asses.”

“*Literally*. She blew apart the *ground*! Then, she took out some of the pillars—which took *half the compound down*— and *then*, she literally picked us up—and threw us over her shoulder like we were a fucking *sack of potatoes*—”

“And carried us to safety.” Bear finished flatly.

Kakashi’s eyes narrowed as he listened. His gaze whipped to the female ANBU. He didn’t notice that they had finished the story however, as he was now staring at Seal.

She shrunk a bit away from him.

The Copy-nin hummed. “I see. Let me *guess*—Seal also healed your

injuries.”

Bear nodded an affirmative.

Kakashi stared, and stared, and *stared* at Seal—until she gave in. She nervously shifted her weight to her back foot like she was considering running from him.

Kakashi was faster.

“*Everyone out.*” He growled.

No one moved for a second. But then Seal had the audacity to sprint into action and tried going for the door—

“Everyone out, *except* Seal.”

Her head hung in defeat as she turned back towards her spot. The others clambered over themselves to get out as the door shut loudly behind them.

He stepped up to her with a scowl beneath his mask. He reached up towards her ANBU mask. She visibly flinched. He clicked his tongue at her—of course, he wouldn’t harm her.

With a small trickle of chakra at his fingertips, he grabbed her mask and lifted it off her face. He threw it haphazardly on the desk—the clatter of it echoing in the small room.

She was staring at the floor and refused to look at him.

He took in her features of dark caramel colored skin, purple hair and amber—almost liquid gold— eyes. Round face...a little bit of a forehead...wide shoulders, but a small build—

A memory from his Sharingan overlapped on top of those features—
...they were one and the same.

“*Sakura.*”

The Seal ANBU winced. Gold eyes slowly trailed up to his as she blanched.

“Drop the henge.”

She let out a puff of air she had been holding in her lungs for far too

long and did as she was told.

Bubblegum pink and jade eyes stared back at him.

He recoiled from the sight as he bared his teeth in frustration.

“What— *why*?” Fuck, his head was throbbing again. “—you were supposed to be *safe* training with Tsunade—”

“*I was—*”

“ANBU is *not* safe, Sakura.”

“I needed the field experience—”

“And she chose *ANBU*—?”

“Well...to her defense she put me in as a back-up medic—which was how it stayed for a while—but then I got a little over brazen on one mission. And they found out what I could do—”

“So, they put you on a *demolition team*? Why couldn’t she—”

“It was the Commander’s right to move me to a different position. If she objected it, then people would know who I was and that she favored me—”

“So, she just *left you* in ANBU—at what? *Fifteen? Sixteen?*”

Her eyes shifted to the top left corner of the ceiling.

“I’ve seen you around, Sakura. You have to have been in for a while—”

She coughed quietly, “Fourteen.”

“*Four—?*”

Holy fuck. She would have been better off with him teaching her.

She made a noise of protest and promptly crossed her arms with a sour sort of pout on her face. Her nose crinkled in frustration—a look he had seen her give Naruto a thousand times.

“*Look*. What’s done is done—you, yourself became ANBU at thirteen—what’s the difference? You didn’t even think I could do it! Much less —”

“You’re right, I didn’t think you could do it. I’m sorry that I was wrong.” He was trying to bite back his tone. “But that doesn’t fucking mean I wanted *you*, or Naruto, or Sasu—...or *anyone*— to follow me in that regard.”

Her mouth snapped shut as her eyes startled. He started rubbing his temples.

“*Why* not the hospital? I just saw you in triage—how do you even have time for this?”

She sniffed primly, but the fight in her seemed to have dissipated.

“Tsunade-shishou said hospital triage and combat triage were two different ‘*beasts*’, and that I’d need to know both if I wanted a chance to save lives.”

Fucking Tsunade.

“Fine.” He let out a deep breath. “*Fine*. I’ll tell the Commander your suspended—”

“*You’ll do no such thing!*”

“There’s an even bigger war coming, Sakura. And I don’t know how much you know about Naruto, but—”

“You *can’t*. I worked hard to promote myself in ANBU. You can’t take that away from me now—”

“I *can*, actually.” He jerked his chin toward the desk in the room. “Interim Hokage.”

He watched her squeeze her fists by her sides, but she didn’t argue anymore.

“It’s just a suspension; not an expulsion. You want to keep us alive, right? Then Naruto needs you without distraction. Sai, Yamato—I need you, too. If we are going to survive this war, then I’m determined to do this as a team.”

She gnawed on her lip for a second, before giving an abrupt nod of head.

“*Fine*,” she huffed bitterly. “Am I dismissed, *Hokage-sama*?”

Ugh. His whole body shuddered from that word. Kakashi rubbed his

face tiredly. “Yes. Thank you, Sakura.”

He watched her grab the blank looking Seal mask, spin on her feet, and shushin from the room. A few cherry blossoms were mixed in with the leaves she left behind.

He picked one up that had fallen on the desk in front of him and almost snorted.

She always had been a bit dramatic.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

The Fourth Shinobi War was fought—*almost lost*— and then somehow won.

Mist from the falls was raining down on them, as he watched Sakura heal Naruto and Sasuke’s arms enough so they wouldn’t hemorrhage out.

The two boys had passed out, of course. And were blissfully unaware that she was squeezing out the last of her chakra—*again*— to keep them alive.

If it wasn’t for her—her *part* in this war—the whole thing could have been lost.

She had pumped Naruto’s heart with her bare hands. Gave Obito all her chakra to save Sasuke.

She unlocked her byakugo seal. Punched a goddess in the face.

She did so well.

He had never been prouder.

Kakashi was sitting on the ground in an exhausted heap as he watched her finish up. Sakura let out a sigh that was a graveled mix of fatigue and frustration.

She walked over to him with such a slow dragging of her limbs, that he was momentarily scared she would just pass out mid walk. Instead,

she collapsed behind him on the ground and leaned back against him, so that they were back to back. Using each other prop themselves up.

He felt her head lean back against the back of his shoulder. She didn't even reach the top, and he was once again reminded how small she was.

"They'll live?"

"Oh, for *now* at least." She chuckled, but it sounded like it might break into a sob at any moment. "Why is it so hard to keep them *alive*?"

Kakashi scoffed under his breath. "I've been asking myself that for years."

"I know." The pink-haired nin let out a pained little whine. "I *know* you've been stressed about them for years—but I can't take much more. I— *they*— I need them to *stop* trying to get themselves killed."

She slid down his back in a pitiful slump like all her bones had melted like butter. He felt her head roll to the side as she slid down to lay on the ground next to him, her head close to his thigh.

She was staring at the two boys that were several feet away. Her seventeen year old eyes looked far too old. Far too concerned—and weary—and pained—

He had the sudden urge to ruffle her hair like when she was a child.

But...He swallowed hard. She wasn't a child anymore—

No. She was an ANBU. After this, she'd be a field promoted jonin—his equal.

(His *equal*. What *the f—*)

She didn't even look like a child anymore.

(When—*how*— did that happen? Did he *miss* it?)

She was still short and pink—but her face had matured, and her eyes had become wiser. The little purple diamond on her forehead dared anyone to doubt her again.

He believed in her strength. He trusted her judgment. He knew his life was safe in her hands.

She was a young woman. His teammate. His nakama. *His—*

“Why is it always *them?*” she asked quietly.

“...what do you mean?”

“They’re always running ahead—*diving into trouble*— and it’s always *us*, running after them. Trying to keep them alive.”

He hummed in thought. “They’ve always been that way.”

“I know—just look at them. Maybe I’m jealous...they’ve had each other to fight with, and grow with, and always changing each other—*forming* each other—and now, they’ll have each other’s back. Now, they’ll be unbreakable together—partners. Side by side. Where they always should have been.”

*Oh*, that’s what she was. His—

“Let’s be partners then.”

Her jade eyes were staring up at him from the ground. “...what?”

He fingered one of the little pockets of his vest. Despite the large cuts crossing his chest, it wasn’t torn during the fight; inside was his little origami-Pakkun that he had brought to war with him on a whim. He could feel the small piece of paper hidden there.

Definitely good luck. He was keeping this thing from now on.

“Partners—you and me.”

**–*You and me.***

She blinked up at him, speechless.

“Like you said, we’ll be chasing after them anyway—so let’s have each other’s back. Let’s train together. Take missions together. Fight together—”

“—probably die together?”

“You’re far too young to die.”

“—so are *you!*”

“Fine, then. *Not* die together. We’ll live. Survive together—”



Her face split into a brilliant grin. Kakashi took in the sight greedily. Such a smile may have been out of place after a war—but he didn't care. There would be time for mourning later.

"No, not survive. *Live*—" she laughed brightly. "Let's laugh, and cry, and smile together—eat plenty of delicious things together, read great books together, see and do wonderful things when we can. Let's have many quiet moments—and some of our hardest hours—and everything in between, together."

He couldn't help but smile, although she couldn't see it beneath his mask. He ruffled her hair instead. Hopefully, she didn't feel how tender it was.

"Sure, Sakura. Let's *live*—let's live our life together. Keep each other alive. Keep *them* alive—"

"Yes." She breathed. "Partners?"

His chest warmed. "Partners."

-

[image]

## Chapter End Notes

Sorry! Short chapter! Because the next one is huge~

FUN FACT#1: The words "scrappy and mean" is a small nod to Masks by mads999.

FUN FACT#2: The dog face is one of the easiest origami (and the height of my skills lol). It's great to do with kids because they can 'color' in details. I've made these a lot with my own children and they are very sentimental to me! ☐💕

If anyone is interested, here is a tutorial-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lHu3K-ZuOFs>

A/N: Let me know your favorite vignette? hehe

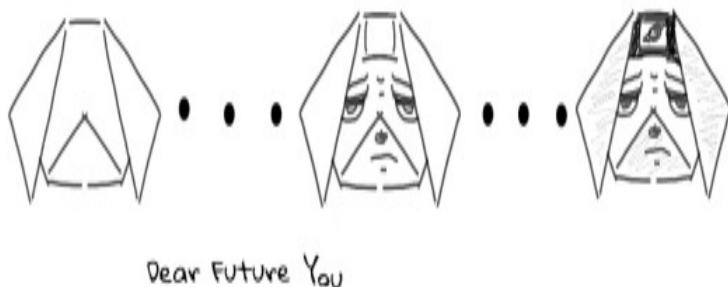
# You are my Future- Part 2

## Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own Naruto. Characters and media belong to Kishimoto.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

[image]



[image] [image]

## Chapter 9: You are my Future-Part 2

She asked for him on every mission—and he asked for her. Until, Tsunade-sama got the idea and started pairing them together without asking.

When they weren't a pair—

They were a team.

Sasuke was locked up for a short while, then put on house arrest. But the rest of them—*Team Kakashi*— were together.

For weeks, Sakura and her 'boys' took several high profile missions—mostly diplomatic due to Naruto's new popularity.

But hidden away underneath the smiles, and the handshakes, and the signing of a peace accords—

Among the shadows and the slums, Hound and Seal scoured the underbelly of the shinobi world. Cleaning up messes. So, Naruto could live in the light of the world he created.

She started using the tanto he gave to her for her jonin promotion. She stopped using her henge—everyone knew who she was anyway.

Her reputation grew. Her bounty went up.

If someone saw pink or silver hair—it meant flee on sight.

The sweet faced Doctor from Konoha, was someone to be feared when she wore a mask. Like putting on her white doctor's coat, it was a different kind of uniform. It meant a different kind of business.

The dichotomy of her life—one who saved lives, or one who took them—was something everyone had tucked in the back of their minds, and wondered which scale tipped heavier.

Kakashi would be lying if he said he didn't love every second of it.

He had a new eye. A new partner. A new life.

For those few months—it was just him and her.

Until...it all ended—

Until, Tsunade decided to *retire*.

They wanted to give him the hat. They wanted to stick his face on the mountain. He had never considered abandoning his village quite so literally before.

In the end, it wasn't Tsunade who convinced him.

"You know..." Sakura was picking at her nails nervously as they sat in a training field after a particularly heated kenjutsu session. Her tanto was out, laying out along with the kit he gave her to oil the blade.

"Maybe spending a little more time in the village won't be so bad. Sasuke-kun and I are finally dating—but he's still under house arrest. And the hospital's construction is almost complete, and my new project will begin—"

"Then, *you* become Hokage," he said with a bored tone, but underneath was a defiant sneer.

She shuddered. “*Ha*. No. Absolutely not. I already have several projects and research going on. I don’t need the entire village depending on me too.”

“And you think I want to?”

Her lips thinned out into a flat line.

“No,” she said softly. “Of course not. But Naruto’s not ready—and no one else comes close to *you*.”

He scoffed under his breath. “Give me my tanto back. This is a blatant bribe.”

She laughed and pulled the blade out his reach.

“No, it’s mine now. It’s my signature, and *everyone* knows it.” She grinned unabashedly. “It might as well have my name on it now.”

He let out a low laugh, but his irritation soaked into the edges of it. Clouds passed lazily above them. A breeze rustled the trees around them. Kakashi heard her shift and then felt her hand move to rest on his forearm.

“What I’m saying, Kakashi—is that you won’t have to do it alone.”

He ignored her pointed stare.

“I’ll be busy in the village. You know I wanted to add new programs and start a new clinic. I’ll spend more time here. We’re still partners.” He saw her smile from the corner of his eye. “Just instead of fighting rogues, and deserters, and war criminals—we’ll fight the council. The clans. And paperwork.”

He sighed. It sounded defeated. “And budgets.”

She laughed brightly; the sound rang out in the open field.

“I promise I’ll be a good advisor.”

*Fuck*. He was going to do this wasn’t he. Kakashi ran a hand through his hair.

“That’s cheating. You only want to be an advisor to fast-track all your projects.”

She laughed again, her eyes gleaming. “That too.”

The next week, he took the fucking hat. Sakura stood by his side.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

While being Hokage meant fewer missions (i.e. none) for him, Sakura still went out and about on missions in between her medical and advisor work. Some as ANBU, but mostly with *‘Team Kakashi’* (minus Kakashi, of course).

And somehow—

He was still roped into *‘Team Kakashi’* (plus Sasuke, apparently) meetings.

And due to the looming house arrest, the location of the meetings (i.e. parties) were rerouted to a certain Uchiha’s house.

Sasuke had taken the home of some great-aunt-once-removed that sat on the very edge of the Uchiha compound. Almost three quarters of the compound was leveled during Pein’s attack, and was therefore ‘acquired’ (i.e. stolen) by the village of Konoha. The small corner of it that still existed was left to the sole heir of the Uchiha.

It was a large home with a huge courtyard and probably once felt like a sign of wealth and prosperity. Now, it was barren and dingy in some places. Mold and rot spotted some of the lesser used rooms. Overgrown weeds, and loose shingles littered the outdoors.

Still—it didn’t have any distinct memories of death for the young Uchiha.

One could even call it a *home*.

(Not that Sasuke would ever admit to that.)

And tonight, like many previous nights for the last few months for *‘Team Kakashi’*, it was a place where they ate and drank happily.

Sasuke and Naruto were arguing over a u-shaped block with a metal grate on it that became an impromptu grill. Yakiniku was sizzling over the heated coals, as the smell of meat and grilled vegetables filled the

courtyard.

Yamato was speaking with him about suspicions he had of Orochimaru. Sai and Sakura were sitting on the veranda drinking sake or beer.

They were already drunk by the sight of them. Her cheeks were already pink, her voice already too loud.

He didn't think much of it. Not until Kakashi noticed—

Sai.

The man had placed his drink down on the veranda and was very slowly inching his face towards Sakura's.

Kakashi stared at the sight like he was watching an oncoming disaster.

Sakura blinked at Sai, the haze of alcohol slightly blurring her stare, as she tilted her head a little to look at Sai in confusion.

“...what are you doing, Sai?” The kunoichi had the good sense to ask. “Are you drunk?”

Sai gave his closed-lip and closed-eye smile, but with his red cheeks it almost made his face look like a Noh mask.

“I am attempting to kiss you. That seems to be the normal outcome for our team.”

Sasuke's head whipped around to glare at the man who just admitted to trying to kiss his girlfriend right in front of him. Sakura held up a hand of warning towards Sasuke, but addressed Sai.

“...I see. And *why* do you think this?” She asked patiently, but Kakashi knew irritation was woven in.

“Because all of the younger counterparts on this team have kissed each other.” Sai brought his knuckles to his mouth in thought. “Is it not tradition? I'd like to be included.”

“What the *fuck*, you idiot?” Sasuke raged.

Kakashi leaned back trying not to laugh. Sakura—still tipsy and pink cheeked—stared off in the distance with her face scrunched in deep thought. It took her a few seconds (alcohol does slow the brain, it seems) before her face paled as she burst out a disbelieving laugh.

“Oh gods, he’s *right* !” She laughed, eyes shining. “We’re a *ménage à trois*. A kissing trio.”

“I am.” Sai slurred.

“He is?” Naruto asked.

“I’ve kissed you, right?” Sakura pointed at Naruto. “And you’ve kissed *him*—”

Naruto and Sasuke blanched.

“—*it was one time!*”

“—*an accident! How that fuck did he know that—*”

“And I’ve *certainly* kissed Sasuke.” She winked at the Uchiha.

Kakashi was thoroughly amused, but he looked away. Some things he wanted to pretend never happened behind closed doors.

Sai cleared his throat and opened his arms up wide like he was welcoming all three for a hug. He stepped forward, but his drunken demeanor made it more of a stumble.

“I’m part of this team too.” The pale shinobi said seriously, despite his pink cheeks. “I want in.”

Naruto almost dropped a piece of meat from the grill. Sasuke took two steps back. Sakura laughed—loud and jolly. Yamato snickered beside Kakashi.

“The *real* question is...” Sakura took a deep breath in between her laughs. “Why stop at adding one more? Why not have all six of us—?” Her smile grew wide like a cat. “—and let’s be honest, why hasn’t anyone tried kissing Kakashi yet?”

She winked at *him*. Kakashi blinked.

...Was she being flirtatious?

“A sextet? A sixsome?” He asked smoothly, despite the terror tickling his spine.

“A *ménage à six*. Also known as ‘*Sakura’s Harem*’.”

Sasuke scoffed with his arms crossed looking put out. Kakashi just

chuckled.

But Sakura smiled at him—flushed cheeks, hazy eyes, and a toothy grin—

“What do you say, ‘sensei’? Wanna join our club?” Her smiles turned salacious. “*Just for me?* ”

His pulse jumped. His cock stirred.

Ah—fuck.

He *liked* her.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

“He asked me to marry him,” she said softly into the empty Hokage's office.

Kakashi blinked down at his paperwork.

“Congratulations.” he said automatically to a budget proposal he couldn't remember reading.

“Thank you.” Sakura smiled.

“It's what you've always wanted...”

“Yes.”

“...and you'll be happy?”

“Yes. I think so.”

“Then, that's all that matters.”

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~


“Okay, so here’s the deal.” Ino cleared her throat to alert the room. “Everyone knows Sakura and I have been working nonstop to open this mental health clinic. It focuses on three things: One—therapy for all civilian victims of war, particularly our village’s children. Two—Mission therapy for active, and non-active shinobi. And three—*don’t touch anything Naruto, sit down!*”

Naruto grinned sheepishly and put the paper weight back down on her desk. “Sorry—”

Ino huffed. “And Team building therapy for all active duty teams—”

“But we need a baseline for the team assessment—” Sakura injected.

“*Right,*” Ino flashed her a warning look for interrupting. “And let’s be honest—what team is more fucked up than yours?”

The six of them stayed quiet at that.

Kakashi cleared his throat after a second. “And why am I here?”

“Well, Hokage-sama—”

“Kakashi. Please.”

Ino raised a blonde brow. “*Hokage-sama*, you *were*—and Sakura insists, *still are*—a part of this team. Therefore, your input is required.”

Kakashi glared at Sakura. She fluttered her lashes and blinked at him in an utter picture of innocence. Damn, her.

“*Alright!* Today will be easy. We’ll start off with some group exercises. Think of them like games—”

Ino pulled out a clip board.

“Let’s start with word association. We’ll go around to each member, and I’d like you all to say one word that sums that person up as a whole. A description of their entire character. And then another word—how you feel about them right now, in this very moment.”

Naruto groaned loudly. Sakura looked like she was regretting agreeing to this. Sasuke’s staring was growing narrower by the second. Sai looked intrigued. Yamato was blank faced.

Kakashi was—tired. So, fucking tired.

Ino grinned—a maniacal, torturous grin that was full of sadistic delight.

(Who signed off on her being a therapist?)

“Ok, let’s start with Naruto as our subject. How about you start, Yamato? What is one word you would describe Naruto as, and one for how you feel about him.”

They went around the room. Ino took notes.

Naruto was given a lot of *gutsy*, *brave*, or *strong* kind of words. Except for Sasuke—he called him *stupid*. Sakura called him *warm*, ‘like sunlight’. Most of them called him *friend*.

Sasuke was imbued with *powerful*, *ambitious*, and *scarred*. Naruto called him *brother*, but chose *anger* for his second word. Sai called him *lost*. Sakura called him *family*, and that what she felt for him was *love*. Kakashi said *regret*.

Sai was painted with *perseverance*, *artistic*, or *learning*. Yamato called him *brave*. Sakura called him *annoying*, but she smiled such a warm smile, that even Sai knew it was layered with more. The word *friend* came up just as much as Naruto.

Yamato was bestowed with *protector*, *competent*, and *foundation* among other things. Naruto said the team’s *base*, and ‘would always have our back’. Sai called him an *inspiration*. Kakashi called him *resilient*.

Sakura was next. A lot of *smart*, *intelligent*, and *strong* were thrown around. Sai described her as *ugly*; but when he called her *kind* right after, and it was said with such a soft, mellow tone that she started tearing up. Sasuke called her his *future*. Yamato called her *capable*. Naruto smiled, and called her *sister*.

“What about you, Kakashi-sama? What do you think of Sakura?” Ino asked professionally.

Kakashi blanked. There was so much—

His mind swarmed itself of memories—moments—they had together.

She was part of him—like Obito and Rin. Minato. And then Naruto and Sasuke—she was *everything*.

“Tenacious.” Stubborn. Formidable. An unstoppable force.

Unyielding.

–Insatiable.

He heard his chosen word come out of his mouth, but it wasn't enough. It wasn't even close to encompassing all that she was.

Ino wrote down the disappointing word anyway. "And how do you feel about her now?"

They were staring at each other now—emerald meeting charcoal. Her pensive stare that he recognized now as her finding a puzzle she couldn't quite figure out. A cat plotting to open a canary's cage.

How did he feel about her?

His equal. His partner. The first word that came to mind was—*need*. He needed her.

His eyes shifted to the Uchiha sitting next to her. No, he couldn't say that. Sasuke would have a fit.

He sighed and decided the ceiling was much more interesting. He would just spit out a word—whatever came out—well, that was a surprise even to *him*.

“Inevitable.”

Oh. Well, that's not good. That sounded like a promise somehow.

Sakura cocked her head at the very first sound of his voice. Her eyes set aflame. He had to look away.

There was something dangerous there that he didn't want to see just yet.

He could feel that danger lapping at his toes like water rolling on the shore. The coolness of it made the hair on his arm bristle, and his skin pebble.

No one said anything as the room remained quiet.

Ino rolled on. It was his turn now.

They called him *powerful*. They called him *skilled*. *Intelligent*. Naruto said *teacher*—and that burned because he should have been such a better one. Yamato called him *senpai* with such awe that it curled his

stomach. Sasuke called him a *leader*, but then in the next breath said he was an *Uchiha's thief*. Sai smiled and said simply a *dog*.

Ino raised a brow and laughed at that. Then, she turned to Sakura.

“And Sakura?”

She was oddly solemn sitting in her chair with her legs crossed, and her head resting on her fist in thought. Her eyes didn't leave the floor.

“Loyal.”

He felt instant relief at the simple answer—

...but then in the next breath—

“And how do you feel about him now?”

It was small—so, so subtle. But he watched Sakura's eyes shift up to him and narrow. Her nose scrunched up in a hidden hint of distaste; she spat out the word with a somber offense. Like she really didn't like what was coming out of her mouth.

“*Curiosity*.”

As soon as the word left her mouth, she looked like she wanted to take it back. Her jaw tightened as she swallowed, and looked away from him.

The others in the room didn't seem to mind. Conversation flowed and the topic changed.

But Kakashi—

Panic filled his chest. His head was swimming. Drowning along that shore he'd been toeing earlier.

He needed to get far away.

Away from *her*.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

It was ironic that the first time Kakashi ever thought he was in love with her was the day of her wedding.

To another man, of course.

(He would always be a man of piss poor timing.)

He had got there early—*because she asked*—and was watching her order around several people to finish organizing the event. She was a control freak, after all. And he thought him being there early, would be one less thing for her to stress over.

The wedding was small (Sasuke was still a bit of a social pariah) and there was only their team, the rookie nine, and few other people. Sakura wanted it at *their* house (Sasuke's abandoned Uchiha estate) that they had all worked to help clean and fix up for the coming day.

Kakashi watched her direct the poor unfortunate souls that were her decorators, caterers, and florists (although Ino was barking orders right behind her) in a righteous state of perpetual nerves.

Everything had to be perfect. (Says the bride.)

She wasn't in her kimono yet. Her hair was up but not adorned with ornaments yet, and her makeup was only half done.

She was yelling at the poor soul that dropped a vase—face flushed in anger, eyes burning in a mix of anxiety and willfulness—

And...He thought she was fucking beautiful. The thought just appeared out of nowhere.

And the next thought after that, was how much he—cared. No, adored. Fucking wanted in every way—

How much he *loved* her.

Antagonizing. Agonizing. Brimming with energy. Burning. He loved seeing her like this.

Something about seeing her boss the entire room around with such decisive authority, and then turning to him fretting, with her lip being chewed between her teeth—

It felt so much like Sakura—the dual nature of her soul. Sometimes a

natural leader, other times a natural worrier. Never knowing if she was in the mood to cut off your head, or hug you like an old friend. Kill you or save you.

But always in motion. Always non-stop.

And then...

The wedding came.

She dressed in her pure white kimono—the Uchiha fan proudly on her back. Her hair, adorned with flowers. Her face, painted with red lips.

She smiled at Sasuke with a little demure tuck of her chin. An innocent blush. Glowing, tear filled eyes. She spoke her vows with a soft reserved voice. Polite and subtle. Modest and meek.

In that moment, she matched Sasuke's cold icy stoicism. The proud and prim Uchiha Matriarch.

Kakashi *hated* it.

She shouldn't be ice. She should be leaving gunpowder and burning bridges in her wake. She was fire and ash.

Full grins, and loud laughter that made her head tip back and her eyes roll—

“Wow! Sakura-chan looks gorgeous, doesn't she?” Naruto asked him as they followed the wedding procession out to the courtyard for the reception.

“Yes,” he lied. “She absolutely does.”

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

“Kakashi.”

“...Sakura?” He raised a brow at her.

She was still wearing her Seal mask, even though all the other ANBU

had left the office. She stayed on as a combat medic—hopping from team to team depending on if she was needed for a specific mission.

“I need to...suspend my ANBU duties for a while.”

“*Oh?* ” he tapped his pen against the desk in thought. “Are you sure? Sasuke can do missions now. I know he’s asked to work alone, but I can pair you two up if you’d prefer—”

“—I’m pregnant.”

He stared at the pen in his hand for a moment, trying to remember what it was used for.

He placed it on his desk next to the little origami Pakkun that was propped up next to his various other personal items. Paper-Pakkun stared back at him stupidly.

“...”

He leaned back in his chair and crossed his fingers on his stomach. He tried to be absolutely still—nothing could show.

“I—” he coughed. “Congratulations.”

“Thanks.”

Her Seal mask looked as blank and ominous as usual. He couldn’t read her face through it.

“*He’s—*” she swallowed and tried again. “He’s been taking only solo missions.”

Don’t worry about me—I’ll be fine until later—then I’ll need you.

“I know.” Still not moving.

“The missions are taking longer and longer.”

Fuck. Kakashi closed his eyes. “Yes. He asked for them.”

“*Why?*”

“Punishment. Redemption. I don’t know—you’ll have to ask him.”

She placed her hand on her stomach. Kakashi had to look anywhere but at her.

“...you’re not going to lie, and tell me ‘*Everything will be okay*’?”

He gazed at her Seal mask—a familiar thing he had seen during mission after a mission. He’d seen her cut throats in it. Destroy buildings. Bash faces in with it on.

A symbol of death.

Then, he looked at her small hand resting on her stomach.

A symbol of life.

“No.” He said numbly. “I can’t. Not anymore.”

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

The nightmares still came sometimes, but the panic and anxiety had dimmed over the years since the war (*therapy*— who knew? Thanks, Ino.).

While now he had the mental tools to deal with such attacks, the nightmares were replaced with—*other* dreams.

All of Sakura, of course. Or at least—he *thought* it was Sakura.

He’d thought they would be lecherous and absolutely filthy.

They weren’t.

(Looks like he wasn’t a *complete* pervert.)

He’d see flashes and blurs of colors and items. Things he had no recollection of: A teal kimono. Red lanterns. A white Fox mask that he had never seen before. A daifuku.

And pink—so much pink, he was drowning in it at night—that it could *only* be Sakura.

But she seemed a little different in the dreams.

(And she certainly wasn’t sporting the rounded belly of her pregnancy



that she currently had.)

...But it couldn't have been a coincidence.

And then, the voice—*her voice*— spoke to him. Calling his name. But not words he'd ever heard before. Snippets of conversations that his subconscious liked to create.

***Kakashi...***

**You're sort of my hero.**

**I won't leave you.**

***Kakashi—***

**I want and *I want*. And it's never going to stop—**

**Don't *ever* let me go.**

**it's stupid really—**

**Whether we have five years together or fifty—**

***Kakashi.***

A dream. And—

Words.

Just words.

Jumbles of letters—phonics and diction; consonants and vowels, that came together into the combination of something that his subconscious was desperately trying to hold on to.

There was panting and moaning—the room smelled of sweat and blood.

“Sakura, you’re fully dilated—*it’s time to push!*” Tsunade stood in between her legs as Kakashi watched on by the side. He stood by Sakura’s head, on the other side of the sheet, trying to keep her calm.

“No—*no!* I can’t. He needs to be here—”

“Sakura. The baby is coming whether Sasuke is here or not.” Ino gently pleaded as she assisted Tsunade.

“*Kakashi!* ” Sakura grabbed his hand; her grip like iron. “You said you gave him my letters! He wouldn’t miss this... *Ah!* ”

Sakura started breathing in deep pants before blowing the air out her lungs steadily. He held her hand through the pain.

“Fuck—*please, please Kakashi!*—I can’t do this alone. He’s got to be here—”

She was sobbing. Sweat and tears were pooling around her neck in her distress. Her hair was plastered to her forehead as she begged. It nearly broke Kakashi’s heart.

“*Sakura—*” his voice cracked.

“That’s it, Sakura—the next contraction will be any minute and I need you to push with everything you’ve got, okay?” Tsunade patted her knee; he tried not to notice the blood that was smeared on her hands.

Sakura’s breathing slowed down suddenly.

She changed at that moment. He could see it in her face, feeling in her breathing. She was not the same, and she wasn’t coming back.

She was staring up at the ceiling—eyes wide and unblinking—almost completely still if it wasn’t for her legs shaking. Tears still ran down the side of her face, but without those, you couldn’t tell she was crying.

He knew that look. He had seen it time and time again—he’d even dreamed about it sometimes.

She was going to kill. Destroy. Ruin.

“Ready? One, two, three—*push!*”

Sakura didn’t scream. She breathed loudly with her whole stomach. A single grunt that sounded primal and animalistic slipped through her lips.

And then—

A baby’s cry.

Tsunade half-sobbed as she pulled the child away from the mother. Ino grabbed the cord, clipped, cut and then followed the afterbirth.

Sakura was quiet—eyes searching for her child.

Ino was pushing down on the new mother’s stomach. Tsunade cleaned and checked over the baby.

Sakura didn’t move—didn’t blink, really. He stood still by her side; her hand still gripping his in a vice.

Until, the baby was put in her arms.

“She’s a beautiful little girl. Well done, kid.” Tsunade praised.

Kakashi watched Sakura stare down at the child. She traced the small red faced infant with a gentle finger—her mouth, her nose, over her eyebrows and then on to her little hands—like she was holding something precious and breakable in her hands.

The room was quiet—Sakura’s face was void. Her eyes like steel. He watched Ino and Tsunade exchange a concerned glance.

Kakashi let go of her hand, but remained dutifully by her side—waiting for the fallout.

It came moments later.

“I’m done.” Sakura said firmly.

Ino—the brave woman—spoke up. “...what do you mean?”

*“I’m done.”* She repeated and looked up at them. Tsunade’s eyes narrowed at whatever she saw in Sakura’s eyes. Ino took a step back, her face blanched. “I’m done with Sasuke.”

Ino looked like she was going to protest, but Tsunade spoke over her. “Sakura. You don’t know what you’re saying. You’re exhausted, in pain, and hormonal right now—”

Sakura clicked her tongue, and let out a slow breath that hissed between her teeth. “*Get out.*”

Tsunade’s mouth slammed shut. Ino tried to step in, “Sakura—”

“*Get. Out.* ...If you’re not going to listen, it’s *useless.*”

Tsunade stared at him coldly. Kakashi stared back. With her nostrils flared and jaw tight in frustration, she stormed out the door. Ino hesitated for a second, hurt clear on her face for a second before she snorted, straightened her shoulders and left the room to follow Tsunade.

The door clicked shut.

“Kakashi.” She turned to him then, and he finally got a look at the eyes he knew he would find. They were wide and dilated—burning with adrenaline and resolve like it flooded her system like a drug, and she was moments away releasing on some unfortunate victim.

It was terrifying. It was beautiful.

He never loved her more.

“I want a divorce.” She said softly, almost a hiss. “As soon as possible. You’re the Hokage—what they think doesn’t matter. I just need you to sign the paper.”

He wasn’t stupid enough to argue with her. “Okay.”

She blinked up at him like she didn’t expect him to agree so quickly. Sarada shifted in her arms and moved to suck on her own fingers. Sakura brought her attention back to her daughter as she began stroking her softly.

Slowly, so so slowly—cracks began to form.

“He knew I was pregnant. He *knew*. I sent him letter after letter—for *months*—and although he always replied to your mission reports—” She swallowed hard, and her eyes narrowed. “He never once answered mine.”

Kakashi’s throat squeezed. “No. He didn’t.”

“And you gave him time off—I *know* you did.”

He wanted to look away from her, but he couldn't. “Yes. I did.”

She scoffed.

“Then, he *chose* not to be here.” The venom in her voice was jarring next to the soft petting of her daughter's hair. Her eyes were still on fire in a cold smoldering green flame that was bitter and righteous.

“I'll never forgive him.” She said with murder on her face, a guillotine on the loose. “We may be friends again someday. And I certainly won't keep his daughter from him—but *he and I*—”

Despair settled in his chest. Her pain was his pain.

“*I'll never forgive him.*”

She finished the thought echoing in his head.

*Yurusanai.*

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

He gave her a house.

Because he was a love struck fool—

And because she wanted to be anywhere, but the Uchiha compound.

The divorce took a little over a month as the council argued back and forth, until Sakura stood before them in an obvious threat that had them bowing down to her gracefully.

She stopped wearing red and pink, and switched to black like she was in a self-imposed state of mourning. Some of her friends expressed their concern. But Kakashi wasn't concerned in the least—

She was rebuilding herself—brick by brick—and he was waiting for the outcome. She stopped faking smiles and keeping her opinions hidden. She was brash and honest, and when she smiled—they were

real and true—and mostly for Sarada.

So no, he wasn't worried.

The divorce set something in her free.

Sasuke didn't object. And he didn't even come home for it.

And when she was back to *Haruno Sakura*, she had nowhere to go.

So, he gave her the old Hatake compound. He didn't use it, and it seemed like the right thing to do.

The land was ancient, but the house wasn't.

It was the house his father built for his mother. It was aged and dilapidated now, but when he brought her there for the first time, she stared at it like it was the most precious gem.

He brought her along the beaten path, to the little gate that guarded the edge of the property. And when he swung it open for her, he saw the little house nestled in the woods.

It was a mix of styles. The facade of the house was western with white painted wood and faded robin's egg blue shutters, but the inside still had traditional elements of tatami rooms and sliding doors. The best of both worlds.

She surveyed the home, running her hand along the old bones of the house like a caress. And when she was done, she collapsed on the tatami mat floors in a little sitting room right off the western-style dining and kitchen.

It was the same room he had last seen that pool of blood that came from his father—but she didn't need to know that.

Sakura was staring up at the little stained-glass window above the door while stroking the tatami floor like a familiar pet. She sighed and hummed happily—he tried not to preen at the sound.

“There are fairies that live here.” She said breathily. Kakashi cocked his head at her, amused. She continued on almost dreamily, “And little bears. And girls with red hoods. A woodcutter in an enchanted forest. It's the stuff of fairytales...”

He lowered his mask and smiled at her. After all, she had already seen his face a week ago when Sarada had yanked it down a hunger fit.

(They really had no secrets between them. Not anymore.)

Her eyes flashed to his face, like she was still trying to greedily take in the sight. It made him smile wider.

“Do you want it?” Well, that sounded provocative. He added, “The house?”

She snorted like he said something incredibly stupid. “Of course, I want it. Are you sure you're okay with it?”

“Yes.” His tongue was apparently loose today. “It's old and broken though, it might not be worth the trouble.”

She smiled fondly at the ceiling. “Sounds like all it needs is a little bit of love, that's all.”

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

“What about Sarada?”

“She's fine. She'll be with Ino and Inojin while I'm gone. I know she can handle two toddlers, but I'm a little concerned about Sai. Could you look in every once in a while?”

Kakashi sighed and leaned back in his chair. “Of course. But Sakura—this is a bad idea.”

She was wearing the doctor's coat today over a navy blue pair of scrubs. She was the Healer then, at least for today. She crossed her arms and cocked her hip in disagreement—a look he'd seen a million times.

“I know, I know—but Amegakure needs *help*. It's been over four years since the war ended and their hospital and medical system are *just*—” she cleared her throat. “They need help. They asked—and I think we should go.”

“Why *you*, though? Can't we send Shizune?”

“They asked for *me*.”

He blinked at her lazily. “That is... *exactly* my concern.”

She snorted. “Send an ANBU detail with me if you want. But I’m still going.”

He fought the urge to rub his hands down his face. Instead, he leaned back—as far as his sad and abused office chair would let him; it squeaked in protest.

“This is it. This is going to bite us in the ass.”

She shrugged. “What’s the worst that could happen? It’s just a week or two.”

He stared at her blankly. He felt his eyes droop in a type of weariness that he hadn’t felt in years. A cold blanketed him that settled in his bones, and his voice came out like ice—his words forming crystals in the air.

“*Sakura*.” She stilled at his tone, waiting for him to speak.

“If something happens to you, I’ll kill them all.”

Quiet veiled the room. A noise shifted in the rafters above them, but Sakura didn’t look away from him. The cloudy, milkiness of jade stared back at him.

“I know,” she said.

Did she, really. He scoffed under his breath. No, he didn’t think she *could*.

“I’ll be *fine*, Kakashi.” She squeezed his shoulder softly and turned to leave.

And that was that.

(Except it wasn’t. It wasn’t fine at all.)

“...Kakashi?”

Oh no. Not a good sign.

It was always ‘*Kakashi-sama*’ when he was being annoying and everything was normal.

He raised his eyes to Genma, as he pushed his paperwork away from



him. He didn't say anything, waiting for Genma to speak.

The Monkey ANBU fidgeted on the other side of his desk. Kakashi's gut churned nervously.

"We've received a report from Ame."

His stomach was doing flips now.

"...it seems...Listen, don't kill the messenger." Kakashi's eyes narrowed dangerously. "But it looks like the medical party was ambushed...Sakura was...well, she was *taken*."

Forget flips—his belly was racing, swimming, spelunking. Maybe even doing rhythmic gymnastics—

"Ame insists it wasn't them, but one of Pein's rouge followers. We knew they were still out there, but they've been quiet through the years. Ame says they still blame us for Obito—blame you."

Fuck, *why*—

"They say they are doing everything they can but—she was apparently knocked out with enough sedatives to put Kurama to sleep—"

Oh, gods Sakura—

"Listen, Kakashi—*calm the fuck down!*—" He could feel his chakra leaking out of him. "Clear the area— *now!* " Genma yelled to someone nearby. He had both hands up in submission.

"*Kakashi*—she's—she's been trained for this. She's probably alive—"

Rage and despair bubbled up in him. He stood up and leaned over his desk towards Genma, the wood cracked under his palms. His voice came out in a growl that he hadn't heard in ages. It sounded deeper, richer than it had been in his youth.

"Genma. If she's *dead*—" he spat. "*I'll burn the whole fucking village to the ground.* Is that clear?"

The Monkey audibly swallowed. "Fuck—yes. I get it. You're the Hokage."

Kakashi blinked at the term. He straightened up silently.

Oh, right...He *was* the Hokage. Well, then...

“Put Naruto in charge. Get Tsunade to help if needed.”

“Kakashi—”

“—and then get my Hound mask. We’re going to get her.”

“Yes, sir.”

He shushinned to the Hokage’s apartment to find the rest of his ANBU gear.

...After all, who was going to stop him?

(No one, that’s who. He was the fucking *Hokage*.)

Sakura—

It turns out, was halfway out of her own escape plan by the time they arrived.

He was, apparently, *redundant*. (Her words.)

But—

They returned to Konoha with over two dozen people dead, a fourth of the Ame countryside destroyed, an ‘*open and honest*’ conversation (His words) with the Ame leadership, and a very shaky, very forced alliance with what remained of the country’s officials.

He told them to get their people under control, or he’d start taking a particular interest in Amegakure in the future.

A minor international incident. The Tsuchikage and Kazekage were a little miffed at him.

But he didn’t start a war. Sakura was back.

All in a day’s work.

(He did *warn* them not to give him the hat. No one to blame, but themselves, really.)

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

Time passed slowly and quickly—all at once.

By the time it was Sarada's third birthday, he had become comfortable in his childhood home again.

Sakura and Sarada's presence had done something to the house that he could never do—

They had painted every surface. Sarada had filled it with colorful things, scribbled on the walls and floors with markers, hung her drawings on every surface and put stickers everywhere (*so many* stickers).

Sakura had medical texts, empty teacups on every tabletop, and small potted plants that she insisted weren't dead but 'recovering'.

They had erased the loneliness of the little boy that once lived here by himself and made it a home of his impossible things.

It was a place where Sarada took her first steps. Where Sakura became Director of the hospital when Tsunade gracefully retired (again). Where she became an ANBU Captain. Where he taught them how to make daifuku. Where he learned how to help put a child asleep.

Where he wasn't afraid to go into an empty room anymore.

He was sitting by the little river that ran along the back of the property, fishing with an old rod just for fun.

Kakashi wondered if Genma finally figured out that he had left a clone in the office for the past three days or if the idiot was still guarding a fake.

Sakura and Sarada were playing with the ninkin in a field a little way away—the sound of the young girl screaming in delight and the eight dogs playfully barking alongside her was in the background. Pakkun, in particular, loved Sarada like his own.

And he stared at the sky—

The expanse of it swallowed him whole. It was so blue—so vivid—that he wondered if he reached out to try to grab it if it would crinkle and twist like fabric in his hands.

His heart sped up a little bit. His fingers twitched. He could almost feel the blue silk slipping between his fingers.

All he had to do was reach out and grab it—

Whether it was real or not—

He wouldn't know until he tried.

He just needed to be brave.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

“Come walk with me, Hatake. You’ve been in this stuffy room far too long.”

Kakashi looked up to see Tsunade leaning against his door with her arms crossed, and a small frown on her face.

He knew better than to fight her on it. “Sure. Why not?”

He slid away from his desk and his shoulders lightened just from stepping away from the cursed thing. They made their way out of the building and strolled along the village—her leading the way, and him trailing behind with his hands in his pockets.

Kids ran past. People bustled along the streets. Many stopped and greeted them with a smile and a ‘Hokage-sama’ to which they both dipped their heads in answer too.

Tsunade’s honey colored eyes lingered on her people.

“You’ve done a good job, kid.”

Kakashi shrugged. “I just kept up what you’ve started.”

Her frown dipped a little more. “No. I inherited a mess. Tried to keep a sinking ship afloat. *You*—you self-deprecating idiot—you’ve improved upon it. Made it better.”

He tried not to shrug again, knowing it would only irritate her

further.

“I didn’t do it alone.”

She laughed full of gall. “Of course, you didn’t. But that doesn’t mean you don’t deserve some credit.”

He hummed as they kept walking along the outer edge of the village now.

“Kakashi, I’m going to be blunt now—” When was she *not* blunt? “I know it’s not really my place to say, but you and Sakura—”

Ah, well for fuck’s sake. He had the urgent need to run. He wondered if he shushinned far enough if he could outrun a Sannin.

“Don’t you dare run, *you fucking idiot—*”

Maybe he could cast a discrete clone and swap out—

“Madara’s balls—*just listen!* ”

He felt her grip his shoulders. Each of her fingers dug in between flesh, muscle, and bone so deep that it was a wonder she didn’t pierce the skin.

“*Kakashi!* I don’t get it. What are you waiting for? You spend all your time together. You bring her lunch and tea on breaks. The only thing that doesn’t have you officially living in her house, is that you’re not sleeping in her bed—”

How much trouble would he get in if he broke her arms just to get out? She could heal it, right?

“Listen, I—I understand.” He lifted his head to that. Her eyes full of gold and fury, and her frown twisted in self-hate. “I *understand* not wanting to take the risk—I do. I let every bit of happiness slip out of my hands time and time again. But you—*you stupid, scared idiot—* you have a real chance.”

The words rang out in the open air. He stared at the spot over her right shoulder as if it was the most interesting thing in the entire world.

“She was my student.”

“No. She was mine.” The Godaime scoffed. “You were just a glorified

part-time group leader at best.”

“I’m her employer, essentially.”

“On paper, maybe. But you and I both know you’ve never held one ounce of power over her. She’s your partner. The council will understand.”

He swallowed hard. He was pulling at strings here.

“I’m older than her—I’ll grow old and die before her and leave her all alone one day.”

Tsunade’s eyes grew soft and delicate, a look that held years of suffering, but also warmth.

“You *idiot*.” She repeated, as she clicked her tongue at him in annoyance. “You’re a *shinobi*. What a miserable excuse—she could take a kunai to the back. You could fall off the roof. Otsuki could come back and kill us all. Genma could murder you for being such an ass. How about we forget the ‘*what if*’s’.”

She let out a sigh. It was a kind of sigh that filled with years and years of battering and bruising; it revealed her true age. Tsunade dropped her hands from his shoulders and met his gaze eye to eyes. Honey to Grey. Hokage to Hokage.

“Kakashi, listen to me. It’s really simple. You let *her* decide what she’s willing to risk. The only thing you need to decide is: *Is she worth it to you?* ”

Kakashi stared at her mouth as the words left her lips.

He felt something click in his head, and following it came an immediate and guttural response—

*Of course, she was fucking worth it.*

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

He made some excuse about her working too hard, asked Hinata to

watch Sarada, and dragged her out to a festival.

It seemed like the right kind of thing for a date. Not that he'd ever dated before. What a daunting thought.

(He was too old for this.)

Kakashi tried to play the gentleman. He paid for her bounty of snacks and food (he got a look from her every time he pulled out his wallet—it was extremely amusing). He won her a prize (not that she couldn't win her own). He touched her casually. Tried to make her smile.

He was doing good, he thought. He had this. He could date. Dating was easy.

Until they got to the taiyaki. Until Sakura asked, “Is this some sort of *date* ?”

He stared at her dumbly. Fight or flight rushed through his veins so quickly he thought maybe neither option would work, and he should just play dead.

Maybe he should just pass out like one of those women in those romance novels he reads sometimes. That was an option, right?

(Tsunade's voice came quickly behind that thought, “You *idiot*.”)

What came out of his mouth instead, was as smooth and as humiliating as Gai forcing him to piggyback in Suna.

“Only if you want it to be?”

Then, he promptly laughed at himself.

(Gods, he *was* an idiot.)

But she stared at him for a second, and as the moments passed her face morphed from suspicion, to curiosity, and then to something like he had just opened a door to somewhere new and wonderful.

Those beautiful green eyes lit up at him, and Kakashi thought what the fuck he had done in his life to deserve such a look. It was everything.

“I'd like it to be...but only if you're brave enough to marry me someday.”

His heart rapidly sped up, and then stopped beating altogether. She laughed at whatever she saw on his face; her eyes glinted and her grin wide. She stepped closer into him, her taiyaki forgotten.

“I don’t do halfway, Kakashi. If we’re doing *this*—if we’re going to risk our friendship and our partnership—then it has to be all in.”

She smiled at him, as he felt her fingers slowly twine themselves in between his own at his side.

“I’m not looking to marry today, but I want that as one of our goals. I want to *talk* about things. I want to make goals together. I want to move forward. And grow. And change. I want a future—with *you*.”

She tilted her head back and leaned in towards him confidently, but her eyes looked vulnerable. Like she was waiting for him to shred those things to pieces.

“Do you want those things, too?” She whispered small and soft.

He felt her breath, sweet and floral from an-paste and taiyaki, warm his own. He fingered his mask and pulled it down around his neck.

He leaned down to her, the pull of her lips calling him in. Her eyes sparked at the movement—a mixture of panic and hope.

Silly, ridiculous woman. Like he would want it any other way.

“Of course, I do.”

“All in?” she breathed against his lips; her eyelids fluttering shut.

“*All in*.” He vowed.

They sealed it with a kiss.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

They were reading on the couch one day, when Sakura inched over to him. She kissed the bottom of his scar—right below his eye—and then moved to kiss the top of it, right above his brow.



She always did have a thing for his scars.

“What are you doing?” he asked while keeping his eyes on his book, without really reading the words.

“Showing my utter appreciation of your handsomeness.”

“For my face? Or my scars?”

“All of it.” She laughed, “But surely you know, I appreciate more than just your face—”

“I don’t know,” he clicked his tongue in faux jest. “You’ve always liked a pretty face. And since you’ve seen mine, you’ve certainly been vocal about your ‘appreciation’ of it—”

She snorted. “You think I was never attracted to you *before* I saw your face?”

He shrugged nonchalantly, as he tried to hide his amusement.

“*Please*, Kakashi.” Sakura scoffed. “I could have *never* seen your face, and still thought you were the most attractive man in the village.”

“Oh? Based on what?” he blinked at her innocently.

She giggled, to his immense pleasure.

“Well...now it just sounds sort of obscene when you take it out of context. But...your hands, for one. Your forearms. That little piece of skin right under your ear where your mask rests against your jaw. Your voice—”

“My voice?” he blinked.

She was the one blinking back at him innocently this time.

“*Your voice.*” She said, as if that explained the whole of the world.

Oh. He knew this familiar tingle in his spine. If he had ears and a tail like his ninkin, it would be very telling right now.

“Well, now...” he said, an octave lower than he meant too. “*I’ll have to keep that in mind.*”

Her answering smile may have been one of his favorite things.

“Please do.”

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

The morning started out normal but rushed. Nothing special.

Kakashi had convinced her to take an ‘*extra long shower*’ together (*his* favorite) that morning that left her rushing out the door in a wrinkled pair of scrubs, arm halfway out of her Doctor’s coat, hair a mess, and him making eggs.

She had a piece of toast with butter and sugar (*her* favorite) on it that he hastily made for her, dangling in between her teeth.

She kissed his cheek goodbye. Then—

“See you tonight, Love you!”

...and slipped out the door.

Kakashi then continued to stare at said eggs—until they crumbled and burned in the pan.

Little bits of scrambled blackened fleshy bits that felt a whole lot like he was looking at a candid image of his brain right now.

He went to work. He went along with his day. He even messed with Genma a bit.

But the eggs haunted him.

It wasn’t until later that afternoon, when he was wrapping up his day, did he hear the window behind his desk slide open.

Sakura hopped into his office, out of breath, and eyes wide and wild like a cat hyped up on catnip. Anxiety and hysteria seemed to have injected themselves into her being—ounce by ounce throughout the day.

“Okay. Well.” She cleared her throat. “I definitely said ‘*I love you*’.”

He gaped at her for a moment, absolutely terrified that he heard those words twice in one day.

“To be honest—I thought you might run. So, I thought it best to just corner you before you could,” she stated flatly.

An awkward silence filled the room.

“I—” he struggled. “Are you aware you’re covered in blood right now?”

She glanced down at herself.

“Oh—yes. Had to remove a portion of someone’s intestine. A lot of blood. A lot of guts. Also, not important right now.”

He leaned back in his chair and stared at her with no intent on speaking. She fidgeted and then cracked, like one of those eggs this morning.

“I’m not expecting you to say it back. It just sort of—slipped out. We’ve been together for months, and it just seemed—*gods, please don’t hate me*— I just thought—”

“I wasn’t going to run.”

She blinked at him with her mouth floundering. He sighed, a little disappointed that she expected that. But then again, he did have a record.

“I’m not going to say it often. It’s—...not in my nature too.”

She was still blinking at him. So, he stood up and came to her. Kakashi pushed one of her long bangs behind her ear, his fingers grazing her jaw and cheek. She had been growing it out lately and wearing it in a thick braid that he loved to tug on to annoy her.

“I probably won’t say it enough.”

She was blinking hard again, but this time for a different reason. Her mouth started to warble; her eyes started to tear up.

“But I hope that you know. You have to fucking *know*—”

He leaned down and whispered it in her ear. He surely didn’t need the whole damn ANBU detail listening in.

She let out a wet, strangled sob before she latched her arms around his neck. He straightened up—she came with him, jumping into his arms with her legs wrapped around his waist (*their* favorite).

She buried her face in his neck, and he heard her words as they brushed against his sensitive skin.

“*I love you, too.*” she whispered.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

Kakashi stared at the name plate attached to the little gate in front of the house. The words ‘*Haruno Residence*’ never struck fear in him before in the few times he’d been here, but today—

Today, he was scared.

“It’ll be fine, Kakashi. Today is perfect timing—Sarada is off at Naruto’s house. You and I have a free afternoon. It’s time.”

“They’re never going to accept this.”

Sakura scoffed, but grabbed his hand in support.

“Here’s the thing: I *love* my parents. If there is anything in the world, I am absolutely sure of—it’s that my parents love me too. There is nothing I could do to lose that. They might be a little... *disgruntled* with me for a little bit. They might be annoyed with you. But they’ll get over it.”

She squeezed his hand harder.

“They *know* you. You aren’t some random, older man I picked up—”

“No. Not random. Just *old*.”

She rolled her eyes. “You’re only just getting to your forties, Kakashi. Stop fussing.”

He made a sound of protest. If only she knew Pakkun counted his age in dog years...

"As I was *saying*...you're not some low life, or—"

"Or an internationally convicted criminal?"

She pursed her lips for a moment, and then grumbled, "See? Already better than Sasuke."

"Wonderful." He chuckled darkly. "The bar was set low."

"No. You're the Hokage. A two-time War Veteran—"

"—and a renowned pervert?"

She grinned at him full of fondness and lechery. "My pervert."

She had the audacity to kiss him on his masked cheek.

"They'll love you, *because* I love you. Simple."

He hummed for a second. "But what if they don't? What if no one—*not one single person*— in this village blesses this marriage?"

"If that's the case, Kakashi..." she smiled up to him sweetly, and he suddenly felt foolish for being so scared. "Let's travel the village. Let's go door to door, to *all* our family and friends—and *beg*."

She rubbed her thumb over his. Her smile grew by the minute.

"And if no one shows up to our wedding, and it's just us two—I'll still be the happiest woman in the world."

He gazed at the beautiful woman beside him in awe. Then, he lifted her hand to his lips and kissed her knuckles through his mask.

No, it suddenly didn't seem so scary after all.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

He and Sakura were gazing out the kitchen window at four year old Sarada as she played skeptically with Sasuke.

It took him a while, but he finally made peace with whatever demons he had and decided to come back to Konoha long term.

Sakura gave him a lecture of a lifetime—full of subtle threats, and cutting words that felt like she was peeling the man’s skin layer by layer. Naruto simply punched him in the face.

Sarada—she was still cautious, but interested in the man that looked so much like herself.

Kakashi kept his words (and fists) to himself.

“Are you okay?” he asked as she leaned against his shoulder, still watching the two black haired Uchiha outside.

She hummed for a second, brow twitching in thought, but didn’t answer.

“Still angry?” Gods, he hoped she was. He was.

“Of course, I am.” She snorted, to his delight. “I think I’ll always be angry at him—he left us *twice*.”

Kakashi put his arm around her, his silver wedding band glinting in the light.

“But—” Sakura’s jaw clicked as she swallowed. “*She* doesn’t know that. Looking at her makes me think he has a chance to set things right, but it’s up to him now. He has to come through.”

Ah, he understood her. Sarada’s was Sasuke’s last chance at redemption for them. He watched the little girl’s smile as she played. The same little girl, he had the privilege of watching grow.

“If he *hurts* her—I’ll break every bone I can.” He divulged.

“Yes.” She turned her head and laughed into his shoulder to cover it from view. “We can do it together—what I wouldn’t give to rearrange those pretty features of his...”

He took in her threatening smirk—and all the things it promised—and wondered if he should find that as incredibly attractive as he did.

She laid her head back on his shoulder, soft and warm, and right where it always seemed to be.

Sakura sighed, “He might be her blood. But to me, she’ll always be

your daughter.”

He knocked his head against hers adoringly. Warmth filled his chest, like it did so often these days.

Yes, he certainly liked the sound of that.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

There was panting and moaning—the room smelled of sweat and sex.

It smelled of ecstasy. Of calamity. Of *her*.

It made his mouth water, and spine tingle. His lungs greedily tried to keep it in their capacity for as long as possible, and his tongue tried to remember the taste long after it had gone.

Kakashi was kneeling on the ground between her legs, as she lay splayed out before him trying to catch her breath.

(He was exactly where he wanted to be—on his knees. For her.)

Sakura’s eyes were tightly shut as she panted, legs and sex wide open, and on display for him. One of her arms stretched above her head, the other resting on her breast, as he watched a strand of pink hair that was stuck to her lip flutter with each breath.

She was flushed from her cheeks down to her toes—His pride swelled as she came apart on his tongue.

Her breasts were heavy and full, and her stomach was round and stretched with child.

(*His* child.)

Oh, how he loved this new form of hers. Adored it. Worshiped it.

He loved her stretch marks, and the little line that shadowed from her navel down to her sex. Swollen breasts and swollen ankles. He loved it all.

“Look at you.” He hummed.

He placed a soft kiss on her inner thigh—the soft, pudgy portion that now jiggled when she walked that utterly captivated him—and laid his head on her.

Kakashi stared at her—tried to memorize her—like his Sharingan was still there to hide away the image.

“*Pretty wife...*” he seduced, silk on his tongue. “If only you could see yourself now.”

She peeked open those cat-like eyes that were hooded, and dark. He leaned over her as he smiled at her, and they dilated even further to his thrill.

His cock twitched—angry and eager. A groan rumbled in his chest.

But he ignored it.

After all, it wasn’t about *him*.

It was all about *her*.

The fucking prettiest damn thing he had ever seen.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

“You want another one?” Sakura asked whimsically, as they watched a plump little Saki sit between Sarada’s legs as they played on the floor. His little tuft of soft, dusky blush-colored hair sticking up in all directions as Sarada laughed and made it more of a mess.

“That’s up to you.”

“Would you hate me if I said I wanted another child?”

He chuckled. “I’d endeavor to give you a whole fucking clan, if that’s what you wanted.”

She grinned up at him, “The world could use a little more color in it.”

He kissed the crown of her bubblegum hair.

“We’ll conquer the world with shades of pink. They’ll bow to your brilliance.” He joked.

She laughed so brightly, he thought it might blind and ensnare the world, too.

“Grey always did seem to bring out the best of pink.” She said simply, and thread her fingers through his hair, and kissed his cheek as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

~~~~~ へのへのもへじ ~~~~~

“There’s something coming. Whatever it is—it’s big and fast—and definitely heading straight for Konoha,” explained Naruto as he looked off at the distance to something Kakashi couldn’t see.

His eyes had slitted pupils and the orange marking of his Sage mode. He had never been so grateful to Jiraya for teaching Naruto these things.

Genma materialized seconds later in the middle of the room. Monkey mask in place.

“An ANBU detail at the border spotted the disturbance. It’s still far off, but—I can’t believe I’m saying this—but looks like a huge fucking *bug*. The long one with a whole bunch of legs.”

Kakashi leaned back in his chair and pinched the bridge of his nose—he felt a headache coming on.

“How many legs?” Shikamaru asked by his side. He had almost forgotten he was there in the room.

“What does that matter?” Genma replied curtly.

“Well...” The Nara drawled, his tone perpetually bored. He shrugged. “Depending on if it’s nearer to a hundred, or more like a thousand—it could mean if it’s venomous or not.”

“*Oh.*” Shizune perked up at the remark.

“What?” Naruto asked.

“You might need Sakura then.”

Shikamaru jerked his thumb at her as if to say, *see? she gets it.*

Kakashi chose to stare at his advisors in a stoney disapproval. None of them moved.

“*Come on, Kaka-sensei!* It couldn’t hurt to have her there.”

“Just in case.” Shizune attached to Naruto’s plea.

“*She is handy.*” Genma added, unhelpfully.

Shikamaru simply stared him down and then shrugged again. “And most likely immune.”

He hated them all.

“*Fine.*” Kakashi hissed slowly. “Since you all turned against me.”

The group visibly relaxed, as they reveled in their silent triumph.

“I’ll go get her. She can leave Sarada and Saki with me.” Shizune offered, as she turned to leave the room.

“Get Sasuke, too.” Kakashi added abruptly to Naruto. “It doesn’t hurt to have all three of you ‘*Neo-Sannin*’ together—just in case.”

Naruto grinned like it was old times, “Sure thing, Kaka-sensei!”

Kakashi felt his shoulder slump. He stared at his little paper-Pakkun, as if it was the only person in this room not trying to slowly murder him through stress.

“She’ll be fine.” He said to his Good Luck Charm. “Right?”

The little grumpy pug made of paper stared back at him stupidly.

(He should have known better.)

“Where is my fucking wife? ”

“Sakura-chan will be *fine*, Kaka-sensei—”

“I wasn’t speaking to you, Naruto. Shut up, and let Sasuke answer.”

The Uchiha crossed his arms and grumbled, as he glared back at Kakashi in full scowl. The only thing stopping Kakashi from murdering the (almost) Last Uchiha was his desk separating them in the room.

“I can track her. It won’t be a problem—” Sasuke started.

“How do you *know* ? What if she got dumped in the lava dimension again, or—”

“She wasn’t moved in *space*. Just time—let my chakra recover and then we can go get her—”

“How much time was she displaced in?” Kakashi asked.

“Years maybe, I don’t know.”

“*Years?* ” Naruto cried.

“*Look*. I was just trying to *move* her—to you know, *save* her fucking ass. Just in case that wasn’t clear.” Sasuke growled. “And somewhere between the giant bug and the kunai coming towards her, I overshot it a bit—”

“Sounds like a common thing with you,” Naruto mumbled.

Sasuke quickly grabbed the pencil holder sitting on Kakashi’s desk, and threw it at Naruto’s head. Pens and pencils clattered as it hit the wall, Naruto laughed when he missed.

“*Fuck you*. I’m sorry if I was focused on taking down the fucking giant bug—”

“*Uh, no*— I took it down. I did the final blow—”

Kakashi, drowning in immense displeasure, had enough.

“*Listen, you two*.” he stated so slow and concise that it made the two grown men in front of him freeze. “Go eat. Go sleep. Go get a fucking

spa treatment, for all I care—but do whatever you need to do to recover, and *go get my fucking wife.*”

“*Hey!* Not cool Kaka-sensei—”

“*Dammit*, Kakashi—”

Kakashi closed his eyes, and rubbed his temples in frustration. He was scared to open them, as surely the only thing he could muster right now was thoughts of murder.

“*Sasuke.*” He seethed. “If you don’t get out of this office and start doing whatever you need to do to recover—I’m going to hold you down and pluck those damn eyes from your fucking head, and go get her *myself.*”

Sasuke immediately bristled; his eyes narrowed dangerously as his mouth opened in a sneer—

But Naruto came through. He clamped his hand over the Uchiha’s mouth and held him back in a vice.

“*Okay, okay...*” Naruto tried to soothe, but he was struggling to hold Sasuke back. “We’re done here—We. Are. done.—do you hear me? *Chill the fuck out, Sasuke—*”

Sasuke grumbled beneath his hand, as his Sharingan spun at Kakashi.

“Kaka-sensei, we’re just going to go, and we’ll be back in a few days, yah? I’ll go get him checked out at the hospital and see if they can speed it up—and then we’ll be gone.”

Kakashi didn’t answer. Didn’t have the mind, or the strength too.

Naruto laughed nervously, and hauled the Uchiha back and out the door.

He watched them go, and when he looked down, he finally noticed the arm of his chair was cracking beneath his white-knuckled grip.

His old friends heard the call, and came back to him—

Panic gripped his throat. Anxiety covered his eyes with icy hands. Fear whispered terrible things in his ear.

He *needed*—

He needed Sakura.

-

## Chapter End Notes

FUN FACT#1: Sakura's response to Kakashi's family home with the fairytales is a direct nod to Matilda, by Roald Dahl.

FUN FACT#2: It was important to me to show the festival scene from Kakashi's point of view. My husband and I have often discussed the 'moment' we knew something changed between us. He has this very specific moment he recalls--that he absolutely loves, and I absolutely \*hate\*. He thought I was adorable; while I thought I was an absolute idiot lol. So, while Sakura thinks of it as this life changing, beautiful moment...Kakashi is like "god, how embarrassing." haha perceptions.

FUN FACT#3: The 'I love you' scene--is somewhat based on us too; My husband kept telling me over and over again when we first started dating that he wasn't the type to say, 'I love you' (his Japanese breeding was coming out). He warned me repeatedly. And then--a few months later as I was leaving his house. He blurted 'Bye, love you' on accident. Promptly froze; tried to close the door on me; and pretended like it never happened haha! 🤔 Safe to say--He did not live up to his warning. I get 'I love you's all the time now!

FUN FACT#4: The words "pretty wife" ended up as a nod to the amazing sex scene in Dangos, Tantos, and Sex, Oh My! by onecelestialbeing. I couldn't resist.

A/N#1: Ya'll. OMG-- In case you missed it, FANART was made for this fic. (I may or may not, have been full weeping.) The amazing @juliemaksimuk's art is now added to Ch.2; please feel free to take a look! If anyone else is feeling artistically inclined...please let me know. ☐🥹

A/N#2: I'm just going to get this out of the way now--the next, and last chapter of this story, is SHORT by comparison. I stared at it; thought about it; decided not to add anything more. It is, as I want it to be.  
Hopefully, you think so too. (Please don't kill me for it.)

# You are my Dream

## Chapter Notes

Pixar seems to be on the mind...Sorry? lol

If anyone wants some ambiance~

This entire chapter was written to Pixar's musical short "Paperman" by Christophe Beck.

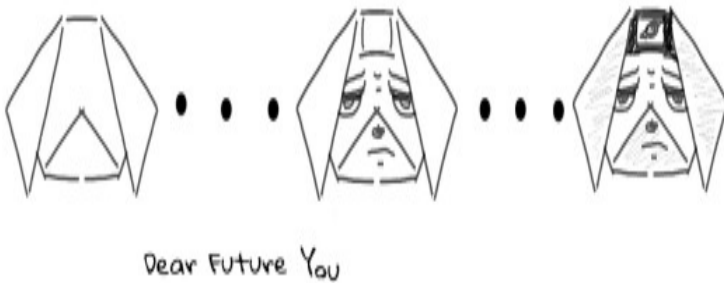
I don't really use Spotify, but it's on Amazon music and here is a Youtube link-

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1WNFobn6zY>

Disclaimer: I do not own Naruto, or any Naruto media.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

[image]



[image] [image]

*Say that I'm crazy, Or call me a fool*

*But last night it seemed, That I dreamed about you*

*When I opened my mouth, What came out was a song*

*And you knew every word; And we [both] sang along*

*To a melody played on the strings of our souls  
And a rhythm that rattled us down to the bone  
Our love for each other will live on forever  
-Coco, Proud Corazón-*

## **Chapter 10: You are my Dream**

Something woke him in the middle of the night. A familiar trilling in his ear—

...and an impalpable panic that he could feel under his skin.

Kakashi would like to say it was because he'd been a shinobi for over thirty years that his instinct kicked in, but he knew better.

It was because he was a father of two small kids, that any sound or movement in the night made him bolt up from his bed—wide awake. A skill he had before, but was truly mastered in fatherhood.

He stared at the ceiling for a moment, trying to come to terms with the indescribable feeling of knowing he was not alone.

He grabbed the kunai from under his pillow—desperately trying not to notice the emptiness of the spot beside him—and slunk from the bed near silent. The digital clock on the nightstand flashed at quarter to five in the morning. Far too early for anything friendly, but never too late for Hokage business.

The Copy-nin sleuthed through the house—kunai in hand—as he kept his ears and nose open to any signs of life. His knee threatened to crack loudly and his neck was outrageously stiff, but he tried to smooth his movements over with years of training.

The deafening silence continued. The ringing became an unnatural tune in his ear—a soundless chorus—the melody both mute and blaring at the same time.

But far too quiet. Far too still.

No. It wasn't until he reached the genkan, and he watched the front door open—little by little and as quietly as possible—did he smell her.

Her scent flooded his lungs. Adrenaline rushed so heavily through his body in relief, that he almost felt faint. That *fortissimo* of trilling rattled around his brain as his blood rushed to his head.

She was trying to sneak into the house, oblivious to him watching. Muffled footsteps made their way in, followed by the soft sound of her slipping her sandals off. She scanned the room, and found him there, waiting for her—

He took in her hair. And eyes. The face of his wife.

Warmth blanketed his skin, and his chest swelled in a crescendo of solace and succor.

Her name blurred in his mind; lost somewhere between dream and reality—

But it echoed in every corner. Turning into a name—

*Sakura.*

~~~~~ さくら ~~~~~

“Kakashi?” she asked quietly into the room.

He was hiding behind a corner of a wall that was tucked on the side of a hallway—his looming figure hidden away among a shadow, but his kunai glinted in the low light. She really shouldn't have expected she could sneak in without waking him.

His gaze rolled over her—bleary and glazed for a second. Like he couldn't quite understand what he was seeing.

Kakashi stepped around the wall, as his weapon lowered.

Sakura's breathing grew heavy involuntary. Oh, she missed him.

She took him in—an ANBU undershirt, a pair of old joggers, messy hair from sleep, and—

Her breath hitched.

—a pair of *matching* charcoal eyes.

Those eyes.

Dark, intelligent, fathomless eyes that she had known for years and years.

She tried to swallow the alleviated sob that bottled in her throat.

“Sakura?” he called back, his voice gruffer than the Kakashi she had just left—deep and lovely with age. She knew it at once; wanted to roll and wrap herself in it.

He lowered his mask and pocketed his kunai. She felt him within seconds, his hands running over her neck and arms, her hips—

She heard him suck in a harsh breath. “Are you alright?”

His eyes were still running wildly over her form.

Her throat tightened again at his touch, the feel of it so familiar and comforting that it broke her heart.

“I—“ She let out a small whimper when she felt his hand graze over her jaw, the feel of it short circuiting her brain. “I’m fine—I promise, I’m okay.”

Was she? She felt a little dazed from the warmth of his large hands. Gods, she—

She could cry.

She wanted laugh, and scream, and *cry*—just cry until there was nothing left in her to give.

She was *home*.

Kakashi let out a slow, forced breath through his nose. His grip didn’t lessen though. He was looking over her like he was trying to bottle her up inside himself.

“*Fuck*.” He stated flatly. “Okay.”

Another slow breath from him; she was currently blinking back tears.

"Where are the kids?" she asked with a quiet croak.

"Your parents have been looking after them—" he swallowed and bowed his head against hers. "—I wasn't in the best mood; Ino and Hinata thought it was best."

She reached up and ran her fingers through his hair. His eyes automatically closed at the touch. Good god, she missed touching him like it was nothing.

"I can only imagine," she tried to smile but it was weak. "Did they know I was...?"

"No." He hummed, nuzzling into her hand. "We didn't want them to worry. They just thought you were on a mission."

"Okay." she said softly. His grey eyes opened slowly and cut to her—a slow blink. And then low velvety rumble in his chest—like the words were stuck in his lungs. Like he had a million things to say and didn't know where to start.

"...Sasuke said you were lost in time."

"Yes." she swallowed.

"Past or Future?"

"Past." Her heart rate was climbing slightly.

"How far?"

She backed away a little, and met his eyes—his full of curiosity; her own full of trepidation.

"Fifteen years."

His brow ticked in thought. "*Fifteen years?* But that would have been —"

"When you first became our teacher?—yes."

Silence stretched on as he stared at her blankly. "Did we meet?"

She tried not to laugh. "*Oh, yes...*"

There was a warble in her voice; her tone had betrayed her. Kakashi's eyes narrowed on her.

"No..." he tugged on her pink braid. "I would have remembered you. The Sharingan would have seen through a henge—there's no way."

Her eyes flickered away from his. She could feel her disloyal chest rising with each breath as panic swam on the edge of her mind.

"Sakura?" He asked. "Are you—?...you're scared."

He backed away from her then, his expression turning grave. "What are you scared of, Sakura?"

She bit her tongue, and then slowly dragged her eyes up to meet his.

"I think it might be best to just show you."

Her hand drifted down to her shirt. She lifted the edge of it, until the inky lines of the Yamanaka seal were visible to him. He backed away from her a little more, his gaze tracing over the seal with interest.

"Well, that's...*new*."

She chuckled flatly. "It isn't just for looks."

"Clearly." Kakashi's fingers reached out to trace the marks, but he didn't touch them. "Want to share with the rest of the class?"

"It's a seal." She supplied reluctantly.

"I can see that. What's it sealing?"

"Memories." His fingers twitched above her skin.

He hummed as he cocked his head. "Mine?"

"Yes." Sakura swallowed. "Mostly yours. And others that I saw—Genma, most likely. He's—well, he's *observant* like that. Gai too, if he noticed. Yugao. Kurenai."

His hands dropped to his side. "How long were you in the past for?"

She hesitated. "A week."

"Ah..." the Copy-nin drawled. "Let me guess: you open that, and my missing week pops back in here?" He tapped his temple.

His tone was casual, but his shoulders went rigid as soon he dropped his hand. Sakura knew he was hiding his discomfort. There was something he didn't know. Something he had forgotten.

Something just...missing.

"Pretty much." She swallowed again. "It's your memories, Kakashi. I'll open it if you want, or I'll never touch it again—it's entirely up to you."

He hummed again, as his hooded eyes traced over her. "What I don't understand is your reluctance. What in that week makes you so scared?"

"I don't *know*." Sakura tried not to bite her lip, but failed miserably. "I'm worried you won't like what you'll see. That you'll blame me for not warning you, for not stopping—"

Kakashi clicked his tongue at her softly, but harshly. "And possibly change *everything* we know? No, I know you're smarter than that. It's not worth the risk."

Relief mildly soothed her nerves, but they were still raw and waiting.

He held out his hand to her, a gesture that she didn't know she had missed quite so much until now. Sakura slipped her fingers into his as he tugged her closer.

"I want to know." He stated softly.

"Okay." She nodded, but her mind went blank mid sentence. "Then, you'll know."

Chakra filled her fingertips, as she placed her hand over the seal. She hesitated only for a moment, as she looked at him—

Silver hair, and two charcoal eyes. Her husband.

"Ready?"

"Ready."

Her chakra flared. And the seal broke.

Kakashi didn't know what he expected.

He stumbled backwards, staggering hastily as his knees gave out. He crumpled to the floor, hunching over himself into a ball as the world moved around him. His breathing was harsh and clumsy as he clutched his head to try to lessen the pressure.

The world broke. Reattached itself, and then broke again.

Images of he had never seen, words he had never spoken, feelings that he never knew ripped him apart and glued the bits and pieces back together again in a new design.

His memories interposed themselves layer by layer on top of themselves—a paper mâché of thoughts, emotions, and memoirs.

He felt that familiar ache behind his left eye, although the Sharingan was long missing from his head.

He heard her calling his name. The same voice Kakashi had always known; he heard it every day, and every night in his dreams.

“...Sa—” He tried to breathe out, but his head was splitting.

The woman who crashed into his life from the sky...

I really am Haruno Sakura. And you were my genin Sensei.

She was crying his name, and pushing at his shoulders trying to get a look at his face.

“Sa—...ra”

The one that exploded like gunpowder...

Did you just try to Obito yourself?!

His eyes squeezed shut as another wave of pain emitted from his eye

to his head.

“...Sakura—”

Who grew a new heart so he wouldn't be alone...

I know...I know—you can't afford to lose anyone else.

His own heart stalled at the memory. A spear in the chest. She was so close to...fuck, he almost *lost* her.

Kakasi felt her hands tip his head back, as they flitted over his face and hair. His ears finally tuned into the world, and pieces of her words started to register.

“—I'm sorry. I'm sorry. If I had *known*—” she sobbed. “—*fuck*. I'm so so sorry, Kakashi—”

The woman who warned him...

—You'll grow to love it.

Fuck. He did, didn't he? He really fucking did...

And teased him...

My husband keeps me sated and fulfilled— all on his own.

His eyes blurred, and the room spun. He tried to push through the compulsion to say her name.

The woman who loved him...

Don't ever let me go...

I expect you to hold on and on and on...every day of your life.

I will always choose you...Always. In this world, or any other.

...even if the world falls apart, and we have nothing, we have us.

You and me.

And he loved in return.

“*Sakura.*”

“—I’m here. *I’m here.* I’m not going anywhere—” She gathered him in her arms.

“Sakura...”

“—*I know.* I know, I’m right here. I promise—”

“Sakura—”

“*Shhhh,* I’m so sorry, Kakashi—” she sobbed against his forehead.

It wasn’t until she shushed him that he realized he’d been saying her name, repeatedly. Over and over again. He was chanting it, savoring it, letting it roll off his tongue as if it was the only thing that mattered. Written in his bones and buried in his soul.

“It was *you...*” she flinched at his words, as if struck by an invisible hand, and backed away slightly on her knees. “Of course, it was. It was always...you.”

A strangled sound died in her throat.

“The person in my dreams; the voice in my head—you’ve been haunting me for *fifteen* years...”

Her chest heaved as she stared at him in horror. Her eyes wide and scared, “You weren’t supposed to remember—it was supposed to be locked away! ...but maybe the Sharingan weakened the seal...maybe things might have slipped through.”

He was still kneeling on the floor—broken and battered from the reassimilation. Cautiously, she lifted his chin.

“I’m so sorry, Kakashi. I know I couldn’t change anything, but—” her cheeks were wet, and her face anguished. “I’m sorry I left you. I wish I

could have been with you. It wasn't *fair*— that I got to say goodbye and come *here*. While I left you to some of the worst days of our life—all alone."

He blinked; and wanted to laugh at the absurdity of it all.

Kakashi reached into his pocket, and pulled out his Good Luck Charm.

It was torn in places, worn, and rumpled with years of nervous antics—but the little origami-Pakkun had survived.

He had kept it on him throughout all of this week, since her disappearance. He remembered the message, the one he had forgotten about. The one that he had thought was a dream.

"You *didn't*." He handed her the paper ninken. Her eyes lit up in recognition, and tears threatened the corner of her eyes.

"You were there physically, of course, when the present-Sakura was around." He hummed amused. "But the dreams, your voice, your smell—" his voice cracked. "Your *words*. There were pieces of you with me every step of the way."

She smiled at him, but it was watery and weighted.

He chuckled, "I just realized I watched you make almost the same origami dogs with Sarada last week."

She laughed out a half sob. Kakashi watched as Sakura kissed the little paper dog, and laid it gently on the table near them. She eyed the paper, her finger stroking it lovingly, as if had done everything she asked of it.

"To be honest, I didn't think you'd keep it. But then I remembered something vaguely in your office that was similar..."

"Chicken and the egg?"

She grinned at him, still watery and harrowed. "Precisely."

He reached up, tucking one of her long bangs behind her ears as his thumb trailed her cheek. She leaned into the touch, and kissed his palm.

"I should be mad at you, I think."

Her gaze dropped, somewhat broken.

"*We are entirely unbalanced,*' you said. *I'm confident that I love you so much more, than you love me'* were the words used, if I remember correctly," he quoted for her.

Jade eyes flickered to his own.

"*Hatake Sakura.*" He said with as much warmth and love he could manage without pulling his heart from his chest and placing it in her hands. "You can't possibly think—you *can't*—"

She brushed her hands against his, but looked away.

"I know I love you, and you love me, too. That's all that matters—"

"No." he interrupted. "That's not enough. That will *never* be enough —"

"It's fine, Kakashi." She squeezed her eyes shut. "It's fine...truly. It doesn't matter if I love you more than you love me. Really, I just think —"

Kakashi cupped her face with both hands. She had to know. She *had* too.

"You don't *know* that. *You*—" His voice broke. "You don't understand. You *really* fucking don't—"

He knocked his forehead into hers just like he did all those years ago.

"I fell in love with you. I've *been*—in love with you for longer than I even knew. And I never stopped. It's like you pushed me off a ledge, and I kept falling...and falling. And the wind was rushing in my ears and my stomach was in my throat, until I looked up, and saw you beside me—falling with me too...then we weren't falling anymore. We were flying."

He wiped a tear from her cheek.

Those jade eyes that he loved so much. That smile. The ridiculous hair —

Her. Her. Her. *Her*—

"With you—the sky is open, and the possibilities vast. With *you*. There's nothing to be afraid of anymore."

He kissed that lovely little diamond on her forehead.

“I’ll say it again, Sakura. I doubt there is a world out there where I *don’t* love you in some way, shape, or form. But if there *is*...I’m so damn happy to be in this one.”

Those cat-like jade eyes focused on him with such intent—filled with wonder and awe.

She rose before him; swelled like the tide—full of bubbles and sea foam—almost floating, swirling. And he waited for the crash. For the moment when she reached out for him.

He waited—

For the moment their lips collided; and he swore, it almost stopped the earth.

~~~~~ さくら ~~~~~

Something shifted in Sakura.

Something seismic and earth shattering—

that felt like the first time she ever landed a punch, and the earth crumbled beneath her hand.

She had often heard love described as many different things in her life.

Some said it was a burden to be carried on your back. Others said it was a fragile thing that shouldn’t be lifted with shaky arms. She heard it could fill your days with happiness. Or could rip out your heart.

But her back was strong. If Kakashi wanted to be a rock, she would lift him. If he was made of glass—she would make sure her arms were steady and sure. She’d keep her days busy so that he didn’t have to shoulder her happiness alone.

And she already knew she could regrow a brand new heart, if she needed too.

No. To her—love made her *endless*.

Fathomless. Immortal. It would carry her on long after she was gone, just as it has eons before her. It would be with her every step for the rest of her life and so much more beyond that.

She would face the world, with him by her side, and she beside him.

And if there ever was a day—

...where she *was* alone—her husband gone, her kids grown; she old and wrinkled—she would walk the world knowing that she loved, and had known love.

And Kakashi—

In all the little things this world had to offer...In the feel of the ninken's fur beneath her fingertips, the familiar smell of old books, the soothing taste of hot tea, the sound of her grandchildren's laughter, or the sight of the very stars in the sky

—would somehow still be with her.

Yes, he would still be with her. Together, they would never end.

Of this, she was sure.

~~~~~ かかし ~~~~~

They never made it to bed that day.

He dragged her down to the floor and touched, kissed, licked—every inch of her.

His tongue still remembered the taste of her from years before; the smell of her hair; the feeling of her skin. He kissed her like he wished he had yesterday...or last week...and all those years before that...probably since forever.

It was so much more than a memory. It was a primal barb embedded in his soul.

Kakashi wanted to meld into her. Reform their bodies and be reborn as one. If he could have stitched their skin together, and transfused their blood in an endless cycle, he would have.

He couldn't stop. So, he filled her to the brim and watched her overflow—over and over again.

Until the room was muggy with the sound of their panting, and smell of their coupling. Until she was limp and sated on the floor in a puddle of abandoned clothes and misplaced throw pillows that were pulled down along with them.

She was cradled in a nest of their making—flushed, panting, and slick with sweat.

He covered her with himself. Laid his naked body so that it draped over her in a protective cocoon like those blankets she loved to bury herself in, and wrapped around her in a vice. She didn't shy away from his possessiveness.

"I'm sorry if I was doubting you," she sighed in a breathless whisper. "For thinking that your love was somehow less than mine. I didn't even realize I was..."

She sunk in closer to him, and twisted a hand up to rub his jaw. Her emerald eyes shifted to see him.

"Thank you for loving me."

He wanted to snort at that, but the corner of his lips twitched into a smile instead.

"That's not something I need to be thanked for."

"*Still.*" She huffed an indignant laugh, but it was too soft; too tender. "I'm sure it's hard sometimes. Thank you anyway."

"Not to me. Not if it's you."

He leaned down, and grazed his nose against her jaw. She let out a little sigh that warmed his chest.

"You—*our family*—"

"...I know."

"They are *everything* to me. You are *everything*—"

“—*I know.*”

She looked up again at him—those beautiful eyes swimming to the brim with something he might have chased after his entire life.

“*Thank you.*”

~~~~~ ぱっくん ~~~~~

Eight faithful hounds sat along the Hatake residence on perpetual guard, sentinels in the night. Pakkun smelled someone approaching, as the hairs on his spine momentarily stood up in caution.

It was his Boss’s friend—Genma.

He only relaxed when the intruder’s face was made visible, and the scent matched.

“I wouldn’t go in there if I were you,” The alpha dog panted, as he eyed the fool with his droopy gaze.

“Wait. Wait—*why the fuck not?* He owes me. That ass owes me *fifteen years worth* of money—” Genma started.

“Yah, well—” Pakkun snorted grumpily. “He owes someone else fifteen years worth of something *else*—” a few of the dogs chuckled beside him. “And she’s priority. You’re going to have to wait your turn, kid.”

Mild horror crept across his face, and a full-bodied shudder revolted along the man like he’d walked into this exact scene far too many times. The hounds laughed.

“I told him—” Genma laughed in disbelief. “*I fucking told him*— there was no way that little pinkette wasn’t absolutely in love with the man.”

Pakkun chuckled deep in his throat. “That’s the thing about our pup. He’s got a thick head—he sometimes takes the long way round, even though no one’s makin’ him.”

Genma’s shoulders slumped, and he rubbed the back of his head

hesitantly.

“Well...” He took a step towards the house, “Maybe I could leave just a note, or something—”

Bull lunged forward and snapped at the man’s heel.

“*What the f—*”

“Nah, kid. See, we happen to be very invested in what’s happening in there.” Pakkun explained smugly. A few growls echoed from the other ninken. “And this investment promises a great return.”

Genma bit his senbon hard, as he looked at the eight dogs. “...a *return?*”

“See, we want our Kakashi surrounded by happiness. And in our experience, nothing makes one happier than a pack, a mate—” Pakkun gruffed. “—and a litter full of pups.”

Pakkun smiled—if a pug could smile—full of sharp teeth that glistened in the moonlight.

“Now, we can’t have you messing it up while they’re in the middle of it, *can we?* ”

He watched as the man paled and backtracked his way from the house. The howls of his pack echoed in the night after him.

~~~~~ かかし ~~~~~

It wasn’t until the sun was high in the sky and morning was bleeding into midday, did they decide to leave the house much to Kakashi’s pleasure.

The pack walked around them in a subtle formation that seemed protective for some reason. He would have to question them later.

But he and Sakura—

They walked side by side to go get their daughter and son from his in-

laws. Sakura kept her arms crossed behind her back, but her shoulder would knock into his every few steps or so. Kakashi relished in the feeling of her beside him again.

He broke the silence—

“I’m going to tell your Mother you groomed me.”

“—*don’t you dare!* ”

“I was a young, and impressionable—”

“—at twenty-six years old?”

“—a lonely man, and you fell from the sky. Smiled at me. Seduced me. And played the long game. How was I supposed to *not* fall in love with you? I didn’t stand a chance.”

She tilted her head back and laughed—hearty and full—just the way he liked it.

A few of the ninken's tails wagged.

“You could have chosen someone else, if you really wanted to.” She smiled up at him in jest.

He tugged his mask as he leaned down, and kissed her lips as easily as they exchanged smiles.

“*Impossible.*”

—

Chapter End Notes

Afterword:

I know this is not the perfect story...but I still really freaking enjoyed writing it. 🍷💕 To me, it was story worth telling. (Hopefully it was one worth reading too!)

If there was anything I wanted to say with this story: it’s that we never truly know the depth of our partners feelings. It’s always a gamble. Maybe it’s less than what we expected (i.e. Sasuke), and maybe its way more than we thought possible (i.e. Kakashi).

If asked who this story was about, either Sakura or Kakashi—I wouldn’t have an answer.

At the beginning, I hope Sakura's love was obvious. Some of it is outspoken; some of it subtle—but I hope it was clear of how much she loved Kakashi. And hopefully, not until the end it's made clear how much Kakashi loves her in return. A quieter, more unspoken love. They both grow; they both learn how to love--it's both their story.

I've been married now for nearly ten years to a man quite older than me. I have no regrets; and never will. It's my own unique love story certainly. But being married for so long and a bunch of kids later, sometimes you start to doubt without reason. You think, "I wonder if he still loves me the same way as he did then?"

Back when we didn't have kids to keep us busy; or had set date nights; and I weighed less; and he had a little less grey hair...haha

But then...

He'll do something or say something that will just knocks me back, shatters every dumb thought I ever had, and I think, "I'm so stupid for doubting him."

"I'm so stupid for even thinking for one second--that I mean less to him, than what he means to me."

I think Sakura needed to go back to understand she was doubting him. She needed to see where he was, and where he's going now with her in his life. I hope she thought, "I'm so stupid for doubting him" too. ☺□

Anyway—

At the time of writing this, it's just over 900 kudos.

I can't even—

I just *never* thought that so many would read this.

Thank you truly, to all of you, for reading my story—and especially to those that commented!

Everyone has been so wonderful. The kindness and the excitement have just—
Touched my soul.

Now, I'm about get a stiff drink tonight, and then maybe go on vacation with my husband and kids. Lol □

Thanks for reading, my love-letter...

Til next time,

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!